

**The Academic and Social Challenges of International Undergraduate Students in
U.S. Universities: An Examination of the Pathways Program**

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Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Chapter 1 – Introduction to the Research	1
Introduction to the Problem.....	1
Statement of Problem to be Researched.....	6
Purpose and Significance of the Problem.....	7
Research Questions	7
Conceptual Framework	8
Definition of Terms	13
Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations	14
Summary	16
Chapter 2 – Literature Review	18
Introduction to Chapter 2	18
Literature Review	19
Academic Challenges.....	19
Social Challenges.....	24
Selected Support Programs Offered by U.S. Universities	29
Summary	36
Chapter 3 – Research Methodology.....	38
Introduction	38
Site and Population	39
Research Design and Rationale.....	41
Research Methods	43
Ethical Considerations	50
Summary	52
Chapter 4 – Findings, Results, and Interpretations	53
Findings	55
Survey	55
Focus Group Interviews.....	72
Tests	87
GPA.....	88
Retention Rate.....	89

Results and Interpretations	91
Academic Adjustment.....	91
Social Adjustment.....	94
Pathways Program Services	97
Summary	108
Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations.....	110
Introduction	110
Conclusions	111
Recommendations.....	115
Recommendations for the Pathways Program	115
Recommendations for the Institution.....	121
Recommendations for Future Research	123
Summary	124
References.....	126
Appendix A – Survey.....	138
Appendix B – Focus Group Questions (FG).....	145
Appendix C – Relativeness of Research Questions	146
Appendix D – Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: (CEFR)...	147
Appendix E – CaMLA EPT Skills Level Scores and CEFR	148
Appendix F – Writing Placement Rubric.....	149
Appendix G – Summary: Qualitative and Quantitative Results Answer Research Questions.....	151

Abstract

The Academic and Social Challenges of International Undergraduate Students in U.S.
Universities: An Examination of the Pathways Program

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A review of the literature indicates that international undergraduate students need significant support to adapt both academically and socially to American university life; however, there are few studies that evaluate program effectiveness through an examination of students' perceived struggles and needs. Thus, this study summarizes current programs and progress, and attempts to build on the few findings about international students' academic and social acclimation to US universities through a mixed methods data collection involving surveys, focus groups interviews, and analysis of international students' GPA and retention rates. Initial findings indicate that Pathways students, like most international students, have unique academic and social needs, but were also unique in identifying specific programs they believed beneficial to them. Recommendations for programs supporting international students' needs are also made based on Pathways participants' responses and engagement in this research project.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research

Introduction to the Problem

According to the 2014 “Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange” from the Institute of International Education (IIE), the number of international students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities increased by eight percent to a record high of 886,052 students in the 2013/14 academic year. Compared to 2012/13 academic year, over 66,000 more international students are enrolled in U.S. higher education, with China (31%), India (12%), and South Korea (8%), Saudi Arabia (6%) leading the places of origin. In 2013, government sponsored scholarship programs have contributed much to increasing international students’ population in U.S. higher education. According to IIE (2013), there is a 30% increase in the number of students from the Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission (SACM), a 20% increase in students from the Brazil Scientific Mobility Program (BSMP), and a 37% increase in students from the Kuwaiti government scholarship programs. “There are now 70 percent more international students studying at U.S. colleges and universities than in 2000, and the rate of increase has risen steadily for the past four years” (IIE, 2014). In addition to their increased presence, international students also contribute to the economy. In 2013 international students have contributed approximately \$27 billion to the U.S. economy (IIE, 2014).

Despite the increased number, many international undergraduate students in U.S. colleges and universities report facing challenges in academic studies and social adjustment due to their limited English proficiency and the differences in culture and educational background (Andrade, 2006; Campbell, 2012; Guan & Jones, 2011; Jacob,

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

2001; Miller-Cochran, 2012). In order to address international undergraduate students' social and academic needs and help them with social and academic adjustment to the American education system and culture, some universities and colleges have developed certain programs and courses, including international students' orientations, first-year seminars, buddy projects, first-year English writing courses designed specifically for international undergraduate students. However, the academic and social support for international students remains a critical issue for researchers and practitioners (Hammer, 1992; Ward, 2001; Arthur, 2004; Andrade, 2006).

In order to better understand the issues facing international undergraduate students, and how supports can better serve their needs, the researcher decided to examine a unique program at a private, religiously affiliated four-year university in the eastern U.S. The university has increased its effort of recruiting international undergraduate students because they contribute to the internationalization on campus and usually pay full tuition. Meanwhile, the institution has recognized the fact that it needs to focus on students' academic and social needs and successes in university experience if it wants to attract and retain international undergraduate students (Lacina, 2002). Therefore in the year of 2012, the university developed the Pathways Program to provide comprehensive support to its international undergraduate students. The Pathways Program gives academically qualified international students who need additional English training full admission to undergraduate school. Students accepted into the program usually have a decent high school GPA, but do not have high SAT verbal scores, or low to no TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or IELTS (International English Language Testing System) scores. Currently, there are approximately 4,800

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

undergraduate students and 2,800 graduate students in the institution. The number of international students is 155. The numbers of students enrolled in the Pathways Program in 2012, 2013 and 2014 are ten respectively, and the number in 2015 is five. The countries of origins of the Pathways students include China, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, Puerto Rico, Poland, Norway, Italy, Ukraine, Serbia and Venezuela.

The Pathways Program provides supports for its students throughout their freshmen year. The students begin their studies by taking undergraduate and academic English courses to increase their chances of success at the college level. They are also offered one-on-one tutoring each week, along with an orientation, group study sessions, academic advising, meetings with the coordinator of the program, and social activities.

About a week before the semester starts, the Pathways Program offers an orientation for its students. Sarkodie-Mensah (1998) argued that orientations are important for international students because they cover a wide range of topics, include “in-depth exposure to services” at the host institution (p. 220). The orientation is usually run by the program coordinator, who gives an overview of the institution and the program. The orientation introduces the academic advisor, tutors, and professors who teach in the program, as well as some former Pathways students, who usually generously share their experiences and important information with new students. In addition, campus services are introduced, especially the subject tutoring services and the writing center services.

In the first semester, the Pathways Program offers four courses that students take as a cohort, including Academic Reading/Writing (INST 105), Presentation Skills & Critical Thinking Building (INST 106), World History (HIS 251), and First Year

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Odyssey (FYO). A cohort of the Pathways students creates a friendly environment for them to feel more comfortable to participate in class discussion. INST 105 and 106 courses aim at improving students' English academic reading, writing, presentation and critical thinking skills, as well as teaching students how to avoid plagiarism. Therefore, these two courses address students' English language issues, critical thinking issues, and academic integrity issues. FYO is an extended version of the orientation, which offers more detailed information about the institution, the services on campus, the city, and American higher education (in particular the importance of academic integrity and serious consequences of plagiarism), and American culture. It also offers field trips to places of interests in the city. Therefore, FYO addresses both academic and social adjustment issues. HIS 251 is designed specifically for international students who may not have the background knowledge that American high school graduates possess. All Pathways cohort courses are taught by professors who are very experienced working with international students. In addition to Pathways cohort courses, students take a math and a computer science course with regular American undergraduate students. It allows the Pathways students to immerse themselves into the culture of regular undergraduate studies in an American university without worrying about the language because these two courses require minimal English language.

In the second semester of their freshmen year, the Pathways students take two cohort courses, including a college writing course (ENG 110) and American History (HIS 155). Both courses are specifically designed for the Pathways students. ENG 110 aims at further improving their English reading and writing skills, especially in persuasion and rhetoric. Since students' English skills are generally improved after the first semester,

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

they take three major courses with regular American undergraduate students to further familiarize themselves in American college classrooms.

A sample course schedule of the Pathways students can be found below:

Fall 2015 Semester	Spring 2016 Semester
INST 105 (Academic Reading/Writing) – 3 credits Pathways Cohort	ENG 110 (College Writing – Persuasion) – 3 credits Pathways Cohort
INST 106 (Presentation Skills/Critical Thinking Skills Building) – 3credits Pathways Cohort	HIS 155 (Themes in American History) – 3 credits Pathways Cohort
HIS 251 (World History) – 3 credits Pathways Cohort	3 credits in student's major
First Year Odyssey (FYO) – 1 credit Pathways Cohort	3 credits in student's major
CSC 152 (Intro to Computer Science) - 3 credits	3 credits in student's major
MTH 101 (Math) – 3 credits	

Table 1.1 Pathways Program Schedule

Throughout their freshmen year, Pathways tutors provide mandatory one-on-one tutoring for all Pathways students to ensure their success in each course. The University Subject Tutoring Center and Writing Center provide further assistance in students' academic adjustment issues. Moreover, the Pathways Program offers social activities

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

regularly, where current students can meet with former students and other international students on campus to expand their social networking.

Statement of the Problem to Be Researched

Academic and social adjustment can be very difficult for international undergraduate students when they come to the U.S. to attend universities and colleges. Academic challenges include communicating with native speakers, understanding lectures, writing essays, adjusting to host academic culture, using educational supportive services, meeting academic demands and progress, and learning skills (Anderson et al., 2009; Hu & Zhang, 2013). Some other academic areas identified by international undergraduate students as problematic include lecture speed and unfamiliar vocabulary (Ramsay, Barker, & Jones, 1999), lack of class participation (Thompson & Thompson, 1996), and weak writing skills (Bauer & Picciotto, 2013).

Socially, international undergraduate students often feel emotionally and psychologically unprepared for being a minority group in an unfamiliar majority culture (Murphy, Hawkes, & Law, 2002). They often face intense social challenges due to their perceived incompetence in English and lack of sociocultural knowledge (Lacina, 2002). Some have very little time to spend on social activities due to the challenges of their course work (Lewthwaite, 1996). Other social challenges include cultural shock, discrimination, adjusting to new social/cultural norms and regulations, participating in social activities, and relationship problems (Anderson et al., 2009; Hu & Zhang, 2013).

Unfortunately when it comes to meeting the needs and addressing the academic and social adjustment problems of international students, higher education institutions in the U.S. have been found lacking (Mori, 2000; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). The lack of

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

attention to this issue has resulted in international students becoming “one of the most quiet, invisible, underserved groups on the American campus” (Mori, 2000, p. 143).

Purpose and Significance of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived academic and social barriers and opportunities of international undergraduate students participating in the Pathways Program. The results of this research helped to determine the effectiveness of the Pathways Program in its efforts to assist international students who need additional English language training with their academic and social adjustment. It also clarified which support services should be developed and emphasized in similar full-admission undergraduate programs for international students.

Despite all the challenges international undergraduate students face, Pope, Mueller and Reynolds (2009) found international students to be mostly absent from the past fifty years of student affairs research. The academic and social support for international undergraduate students remains a critical issue for researchers and practitioners (Hammer, 1992; Ward, 2001; Arthur, 2004; Andrade, 2006). However, there is dearth of literature on U.S. colleges or universities that provide a comprehensive program (academic and social) to help their international undergraduate students. Additionally, although the Pathways Program has been running for four years, no formal studies have been conducted to examine the effectiveness of the program.

Research Questions

1. What academic and social challenges do Pathways students face?
 - a. Do Pathways students from different countries have different academic and social challenges during their first semester at the university?

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

2. How does the Pathways Program support its students to overcome their academic and social challenges?
 - a. How does tutoring support Pathways students in their academic studies?
 - b. How does a specially designed curriculum support Pathways students in their academic studies?
 - c. What impact does the Pathways Program have on students' freshmen year academic achievement (GPA)?
 - d. How do social events support Pathways students in their social adjustment?
3. What effect does the Pathways Program have on students' first year retention?

The Conceptual Framework

Researcher Stances and Experiential Base

The researcher considers herself as a post-positivist. In the perspective of ontology, the researcher believes in critical realism, where there is a real and objective reality, but humans cannot know it for sure (Creswell, 2009). She believes that “there is a reality independent of our thinking about it that science can study” (Trochim, 2006, para.6). As for this study, many people may have their own assumptions about the academic and social challenges international undergraduate students face in U.S. universities and colleges. However, the reality may be different than those assumptions, and only studies like this one can add perspectives to the nature of this issue. As a post-positivist, the researcher also believes that all observation is fallible and has error, and that all theory is revisable. Additionally, all observations are theory-laden, and

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

researchers are inherently biased by their cultural experiences and world views (Trochim, 2006). Because of this, the researcher emphasizes the importance of triangulation, which allows multiple measures and observations. Each measure and observation may possess different types of error but triangulation across these multiple sources can get a better understanding on what's happening in reality (Trochim, 2006).

In addition to being a post-positivist, the researcher considers herself as a constructivist, who believes that “we each construct our view of the world based on our perceptions of it” (Trochim, 2006, para.6). However, she believes that individuals can understand each other despite the fact that we come from different experiences and cultures, and what we have experienced can be shared and translated. The researcher came to the U.S. for graduate school as an international student. She faced many challenges in the first few semesters but overcame them with the help of professors, friends, classmates, and campus services. As an international student herself, she knows how difficult it is to succeed both academically and socially in U.S higher education. After receiving her master’s degree in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), she became an ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher. She saw that her students’ struggles were very similar to her initial struggles as an international student. She always shares her experience with her students of studying and living in the U.S. Her students have found the sharing of experience very helpful, and have taken her advice and suggestions seriously to improve their academic and social lives. Despite coming from different countries with different cultural and educational background, the researcher and her students share a common experience of the struggle of international

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

students. This suggests that individuals' experiences can be shared and translated to make individuals understand each other better.

In the perspective of epistemology, the researcher believes in modified objectivist, where the goal is objectivity, but pure objectivity is impossible (Creswell, 2009). As mentioned before, the researcher believes that we are all biased as human beings and all of our observations are affected by our biases. The best way to achieve objectivity is to "triangulate across multiple fallible perspectives" (Trochim, 2006, para.6). Through triangulation, individuals who are truth-seekers criticize each other's work to make it less biased and more objective. Only theories and individuals who survive the process of variation, selection and retention can come to being objective and understanding reality (Trochim, 2006).

Regarding the methodology, as a post-positivist the researcher believes in the use of triangulation to seek reduction of bias and errors. Thus, this study involved both qualitative and quantitative methods. Three years ago, the researcher became the Director of the English Language Institute at the current institution, and she has been working very closely with international students in their academics and everyday lives since then. She has witnessed the students' challenges, and is very motivated to develop a detailed view of the academic and social challenges international students face in their freshmen year in U.S. universities, as well as to generalize the findings to all university programs that are designed for international students. Meanwhile, the researcher wanted to first survey all Pathways students, and then follow up with some of them to obtain their specific voices about their experience in the Pathways Program. In both situations, the

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

best way to understand the research problems is to collect both closed-ended quantitative data and open-ended qualitative data (Creswell, 2003).

Conceptual Framework

Much research has been done to identify challenges for international students. Some transitional issues international students face are similar to the difficulties American students pursuing higher education, such as major selection, time management, social interaction with new friends and faculty, effective study strategies, and timely graduation (Gardner & Seigel, 2001). However, international students face more challenges due to language barriers and cultural differences. Anderson et al. (2009) summarized international students' adjustment issues into five categories, including (1) psychological issues, (2) academic issues, (3) sociocultural issues, (5) residential transition challenges, and (5) career development issues. Similarly, Hu and Zhang (2013) also summarized five categories of the problems international students face, including (1) personal psychological issues, (2) academic issues, (3) sociocultural issues, (4) general living issues, and (5) English language proficiency. Anderson et al. (2009) identified career development as a challenge for international students but Hu and Zhang (2013) did not. However, the common two challenges they both mentioned are academic and social challenges. Moreover, Gebhard (2012) stated that international students were challenged by academics, social interaction, and emotional reactions to their new life.

Drawn upon the studies above, the three stances in this research study will include international undergraduate students' academic challenges, social challenges, and selected support programs offered by U.S. universities and colleges to help international undergraduate students' retention.



Figure 1.1 –Three Stances

In the stance of international undergraduate students' academic challenges, the issues highlighted include communicating with native speakers, understanding lectures, writing essays, adjusting to host academic culture, using educational supportive services, meeting academic demands and progress, learning skills (Anderson et al., 2009; Hu & Zhang, 2013), speed and unfamiliar vocabulary (Ramsay, Barker, & Jones, 1999), lack of class participation (Thompson & Thompson, 1996), and weak writing skills (Bauer & Picciotto, 2013). In the stance of international undergraduate students' social challenges, the issues highlighted include cultural shock, discrimination, adjusting to new social/cultural norms and regulations, participating in social activities, and relationship problems (Anderson et al., 2009; Hu & Zhang, 2013). In the stance of selected support programs, helpful programs will be highlighted such as orientation, specially designed writing courses, writing center workshops, and more.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Definition of Terms

Academic challenges: Many international undergraduate students experience academic difficulties in U.S. colleges and universities. The academic challenges this study focuses on include but not limited to students' English language proficiency, critical and analytical thinking skills, content knowledge, and academic integrity.

Bridge program: A bridge program is a way for international students to get experience in university-level academic classes before they become full-time university students.

Students in undergraduate bridge programs usually take 3-8 credits in undergraduate level courses and several non-credit intensive English courses in their first semester or first year of studies before they become full-time university students.

Cultural distance: It refers to the degree of different between the host culture and the migrating person's culture (Redmond, 2000).

Full admissions: Applicants meet all the admissions criteria of the university without conditions or academic provisions. International students who are offered full undergraduate admissions are full-time undergraduate students in the university.

International undergraduate students: In this study, they refer to non-immigrant international students in the U.S. on temporary visas at the postsecondary level (IIE, 2014). These students come from non-English speaking countries and pursuing their bachelor degrees in U.S. colleges and universities.

Retention rate: The Pathways Program is a freshmen-year program. Thus, the retention rate in this study refers to the number of students retained after their freshmen year.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Social challenges: international undergraduate students experience social difficulties in U.S. universities and colleges. The social challenges this study focuses on include but not limited cultural differences, social isolation, and limited language proficiency.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

The assumption of the study was that the Pathways Program would support its international students to overcome their academic and social challenges. Pathways students would have similar academic and social challenges as identified in the literature review. However, students from different countries would have different academic and social challenges. Tutoring and the specially designed curriculum would support students in their academic studies. Pathways students would have better first-year GPAs than non-Pathways international undergraduate students at the university. The social events the Pathways Program offers would support its students in their social adjustment. Additionally, Pathways students would have a higher retention rate than non-Pathways international undergraduate students at the university after the first year.

Limitations

The first potential limitation was the small sample size for surveys. The Pathways Program is a relatively new program which was launched in 2012. So far, it has admitted four cohorts in 2012, 2013 and 2014 with ten students respectively and in 2015 with five students. Thus the entire sample size was thirty-five. Due to the small number, the sizes for focus groups were expected to be small, potentially three to five students for each

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

focus group. Thus, the results of this research may not apply to the best practices for programs with much larger international student population.

The second limitation was that the Pathways Program has evolved and changed as a result of its development and growth over the years. One example of how the program has changed was the revision of the INST courses. However, the changes were not taken consideration in examining the effectiveness of the Pathways Program.

Another potential limitation was the self-selection bias among respondents. Since the survey focuses on the academic and social challenges Pathways students face and the effectiveness of the supporting services the Pathways Program offers, students with more negative experience may be more motivated to respond to the survey than students who have positive or neutral experience. Besides, there might be some skewed retrospection because the survey was sent to Pathways students who were at all stages of their academic studies but they were asked to reflect on their first-year experience. The data was self-reported so there was also a possibility that students may not report the data accurately.

In addition, although most students came into the program with at least high intermediate proficiency level of English and should not have problem communicating with the research in interviews, some may still have difficulties fully expressing their thoughts and ideas. Moreover, the researcher taught the INST 105 and 106 courses in the program so students may feel uncomfortable with INST-related questions during focus groups.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Delimitations

The international undergraduate students in this study were restricted to the students in the Pathways Program in a private, religiously affiliated four-year university in the eastern U.S. It may limit the generalizability of the result but institutions with similar characteristics to those of the site university may find the results useful by applying the proximal similarity concept (Trochim, 2006).

Psychological adjustment of international undergraduate students was not a part of this study. Teaching methods, the cultural and educational background of faculty and staff, their cultural sensitivity, and professional development of the faculty and staff were not parts of this study either. Additionally, this research focused solely on the Pathways students' perspectives, and did not integrate perspectives from faculty and staff who work with these students in and out of class. Although they were all important variables, they were not included in this study in order to limit the scope of the study to a more manageable size and to focus on those elements that the university might be able to more readily change.

Summary

The rapid growth of the international student population has made U.S. universities and colleges culturally diverse. Diversity on campus is a valuable resource for students and staff to develop their intercultural competence. It provides opportunities for students and staff from different cultural backgrounds to interact with each other, learn from each other, and develop the skills they need to be productive members of the world community in the 21st century (Chang, 2008). Therefore, it is essential for higher

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

education leadership to develop supporting programs to address international students' social and academic needs.

Although some U.S. universities and colleges have developed programs to help international undergraduate students adjust to American education system and culture, they are not comprehensive enough to address all three aspects of the challenges they face. Some only offer orientations to address students' challenges in social adjustment, some only offer English writing course to address students' academic challenges, and the others only offer first-year seminar to address students' retention issues. Therefore, the researcher hoped that this study of the Pathways Program could be a model for U.S. universities and colleges to help international students better adjust and persist both socially and academically in U.S. higher education.

Chapter 2: The Literature Review

Introduction to Chapter 2

International students are attractive prospects for American universities because they contribute to the internationalization on campus and pay high out-of-state tuition. However, if U.S. universities want to attract and retain international undergraduate students, they need to focus on their academic and social needs in university experience, and provide support to retain them (Lacina, 2002).

This chapter will present three streams, including international undergraduate students' academic challenges, their social challenges, and selected support programs offered by U.S. universities. Academic challenges include communicating with native speakers, understanding lectures, writing essays, adjusting to host academic culture, using educational supportive services, academic demands and progress, and learning skills (Anderson et al., 2009; Hu & Zhang, 2013). Social challenges include cultural shock, discrimination, adjusting to new social/cultural norms and regulations, participating in social activities, and relationship problems (Anderson et al., 2009; Hu & Zhang, 2013). By reviewing literature in international students' academic and social challenges, the researcher will gain more insights in what transitional challenges and issues the students in the bridge program may face in their academic studies and social lives. It will help with exploring their academic and social experiences in the Pathways program. By reviewing selected support programs offered by U.S. universities in current literature, the researcher will be able to explore and elaborate the standards for the development of a quality program for international students.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Academic Challenges

The main goal of international undergraduate students is to be academically successful and graduate with a bachelor degree from a U.S. university or college. However, many of them experience academic challenges. Some academic challenges identified as challenging in current literature include English language proficiency (Bauer & Picciotto, 2013; Fayley, 2007; Kinnucan, 2012; Lee & Carrasquillo, 2006; Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2010; Zhang & Mi, 2010), content knowledge (He & Shi, 2012), critical thinking skills (Burns, 1991; Fwaley, 2007; Samuelowicz, 1987; Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998), and academic integrity (Erkaya, 2009; Fawley, 2007; Hayes & Introna, 2005; Jargin, 2010; Kunnucan, 2012; Sarkodie-Mensah, 2010; Zimmerman, 2012).

English Language Proficiency. Limited English language proficiency is considered one of the most challenging issue international students have in U.S universities and colleges, including reading/writing (Bauer & Picciotto, 2013; Fayley, 2007; Kinnucan, 2012; Zhang & Mi, 2010), and listening/speaking (Lee & Carrasquillo, 2006).

Kinnucan (2012) stated that international students' writing skill is limited, especially the ones from Asia because the language structure there is very different from English. Consequently, professors are more reluctant to take on responsibilities of teaching and advising these students because working with them can be tedious and time consuming. Fawley (2007) also stated that international students may not have the language or vocabulary to present their ideas adequately in writing. In addition, Bauer & Picciotto (2013) argue that there are specific gaps in information and vocabulary resulting from a lack of experience with American education. Moreover, Zhang & Mi (2010)

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

interviewed forty Chinese students at eight Australian universities. Their findings indicate that writing seems to be the biggest problem for international students across academic disciplines, even after the students have studied in the university for over two years.

In addition to challenges in academic English reading and writing, listening and speaking is a big barrier for international undergraduate students. Lee & Carrasquillo (2006) studied Korean colleges students in the U.S and concluded that they face several speaking issues, including being uncomfortable with speaking in class, having trouble expressing critical thoughts, and having difficulty answering negative questions. Sherry, Thomas & Chui (2010) examined the experiences of international students at the University of Toledo. Many of the students they interviewed identified spoken language was so far the most difficult barrier, and urged the creation of a relaxed social environment with native American students that would enable them to learn English slang and improve their spoken English.

In contrast, Lawrick (2013) believes that international students are more exposed to English due to the global spread of English, but they are sociolinguistically different because of their diverse cultural background. They argue that many students in China, South Korea, and the Middle East use English and get exposure to English composition much more often than ever before due to globalization. Therefore, they are familiar with the language and have a lot of experience with English reading and writing. Similarly, Fass-Holmes & Vaughn (2014) also argue that not all incoming international undergraduate students need English language courses. They studied three cohorts of incoming international undergraduate students at an American west coast public

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

university. The results show that although a majority of the participants struggle with English, only a minority of them struggle in their university classes. One possible reason to explain the result is that some university courses are not sensitive to English weaknesses, such as computer science, math, and economics. Another possible reason is that university instructors grade less strictly on English but focus more on the content (p. 71).

Content knowledge. Lacking content knowledge is another challenge international undergraduate students face. He & Shi's (2012) study reveals international students' challenge in the lack of content knowledge. Their study examines 50 college ESL students' writing samples in the English Language Proficiency Index. Two prompts are given to the students: one prompt requires students' general knowledge about studying in universities, and the other requires topical knowledge about federal politics. Results show that students' writings on the general topic are significantly better than the ones on the specific topic. Therefore, they argue that subject content should be taken into consideration in English writing courses.

Critical Thinking Skills. Besides the language and content, research also reveals the lack of critical thinking skills among international undergraduate students. Fwaley (2007) argued that in some cultures students learn by rote, which did not prepare them to think critically. Burns (1991) explained that international students get study shock from lacking critical and analytical thinking skills, and independent study skills. It is due to their educational background, which encourages learning by memorization and replication.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Sarkodie-Mensah (1998) indicated that international students from Asian countries are usually familiar with a culture that encourages group work. Therefore, they may feel “challenged by the novelty of being individualistic and engaging in self-initiated critical thinking” (p. 217). Similarly, Samuelowicz (1987) also pointed out the issue of heavily relying on memorization and replication. She stated that international students, mainly Asian students, rely heavily on memorization instead of understanding, which impedes them from learning the content knowledge and how to think critically.

Academic Integrity. Plagiarism has been found to be one of the most significant academic integrity issues among international undergraduate students (Erkaya, 2009; Fawley, 2007; Hayes & Introna, 2005; Jargin, 2010; Kunnucan, 2012; Sarkodie-Mensah, 2010; Zimmerman, 2012). There are several reasons that cause this issue.

First, the concept of ownership of words and ideas is either not accepted or taught in some countries, which causes programs for the students when they come to study at U.S. universities (Kunnucan, 2012). In an informal survey and interview at Boston College regarding international students’ perspective on plagiarism, results showed that majority of the students indicated that plagiarism was not a big issue in their home countries (Sarkodie-Mensah, 2010). Therefore, there may be a lack of awareness about plagiarism among international students, especially if they are new to English language and U.S higher education system. They may not know what plagiarism is, how to cite, or how to paraphrase (Erkaya, 2009).

Second, students from certain countries view plagiarism as a positive factor. For these students, telling fellow students what is going to be on an exam or helping them with answers during exams is a good way to help them survive the harsh American

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

education (Zimerman, 2012). In some cultures, students learn writing by rote. Therefore, plagiarism is encouraged through memorizing texts and direct copying of text (Fawley, 2007). Jargin (2010) stated that plagiarism is common in Russia as “plagiarism serves as a substitute for the importing of foreign books” (p. 244). Moreover, some international students felt that “anyone spending so much time in the library, even if plagiarizing material, should be rewarded for their hard work” (Zimerman, 2012, p. 294)

Third, there are differences in how much copying is considered plagiarism in different cultures. Fawley (2007) stated that several students from the UK viewed consciously copying a lot of material as plagiarism, while a student from Greece in Hayes and Introna’s (2005) study felt a paragraph or more would be considered significant plagiarism. However, another Greek student from the same study felt that it would be acceptable as long as he did not directly copy a concept.

Fourth, international students’ previous educational experience did not prepare them enough for U.S higher education. According to Hayes and Introna (2005), students from China and Greece only need to write one essay and a couple of reports during their entire undergraduate education. Therefore, they lack experience in academic writing. Some students felt that citing a reference was not important in their countries of origin because they only had to deal with one textbook.

Fifth, limited English language is another reason. Some international undergraduate students felt that they could not write better than the original authors due to their limited language skills. Therefore, it was all right to copy as long as they understood the content (Fawley, 2007).

Summary of Academic Challenges. Coming from foreign countries with English as their second, third, or even fourth language, many international undergraduate students face academic challenges. Faculty, staff, and their American peers should be aware of these challenges and what has caused them. Some educational systems in foreign countries may not address the same issue as American higher education, such as critical thinking skills and plagiarism. Therefore, students should not be condemned if they were not introduced or taught to them. Collaboration among students, professors, library, and writing center is encouraged to help address these issues (Zimmerman, 2012).

Social Challenges

According to Wilson (2011), “an important aspect of learning is through social interaction with others and the environment” (p. 14). Thus, it is critical for international students to form new social networks. However, it is very challenging because “their families and social networks are left behind in their home countries” (Lacina, 2002, p. 21). International students’ social life forms an integral part of their university experiences that should not be ignored by university administrators and professors. However, international students often have problems adjusting to the new environment (Constantine, Kindaichi, Okazaki, Gainor, & Banden, 2005; Gebhard, 2012; Lacina, 2002). According to Thompson & Thompson (1996), some international students think that the most critical aspect of adjustment was developing a social network. Some are reported to have very little time to spend on social activities due to the challenges of their course work (Lewthwaite, 1996; Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998). Culture shock can also take a toll on their lives (Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998). They often feel emotionally and psychologically unprepared for being a minority group in an unfamiliar majority culture

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

(Murphy, Hawkes, & Law, 2002; Thompson & Thompson, 1996). Some also face intense social challenges due to their perceived incompetence in English and lack of sociocultural knowledge (Constantine et al., 2005; Gebhard, 2012; Lacina, 2002; Lewthwaite, 1996).

Factors Affecting Social Adjustment. In order to understand international undergraduate students' social challenges, it is important to know the key factors that affect social adjustment, which include gender, age, time in the U.S., cultural distance, language ability, and having a peer mentor or friendship family (Wilson, 2011).

Both Li's (2007) and Wang's (2009) studies showed that male students have less difficulty adapting than female students because men are more confident and satisfied in a new culture and new environment than women. Studies from Poyrazli, Arbona, Bullington & Pisecco (2001) and Seo & Koro-Ljungberg (2005) show that older students have more trouble adjusting than younger students. The reason is that older students' "values, customs, and interests may have been set" (Poyrazli, et al., 2001, p. 59)." As for cultural distance, current literature show that students from further cultural distance experience more difficulty adapting to host culture than students from closer cultural distance (Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Searle & Ward, 1990; Abe, Talbot & Geelhoed, 1998).

However, there are mixed results regarding how time in the U.S. affecting social adjustment. Studies from Ward & Kennedy (1996), Wilton & Constantine (2003), Ying (2005), and Zhang & Rentz (1996) all show a decrease in difficulty of social adjustment over time. Meanwhile, Ward, Okura, Kennedy & Kojima (1998) report that there is an increase in difficulty over the first six month, and then a decrease afterwards. However,

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Ye (2005) indicates that there is no significant differences in difficulty of social adjustment over time.

As Ward (2004) indicating in his study, “language skills are important because they affect the quality and quantity of intercultural interactions” (p. 190). Current literatures all show that the better the understanding of the host country language, the easier the social adjustment process (Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Ward, 2004, Yeh & Inose, 2003). Additionally, Rajapaksa & Dundes (2002), Ward & Kennedy (1993) and Ward & Searle (1991) all report that having mentors or friendship families in the host country result in less difficulty adapting to the host country culture because “student mentors and friendship families can help to increase host cultural knowledge and ease adjustment difficulties” (Wilson, 2011, p. 30).

International undergraduate students are born and raised in countries outside of the U.S., and come to the U.S. for higher education when they are 18 years old. Many of them are from countries that have very different culture and values than U.S. In most cases, English is not their first language. Additionally in many circumstances, it is their first time living in a foreign country on their own. Thus, older ages, minimal time in the U.S., far cultural distance, limited language ability, no mentors or friendship families can all lead to social challenges.

Social Isolation. In Tompson and Tompson’s (1996) study, students report to feel lonely and not fitting in the mainstream social life. This feeling keeps them “mentally preoccupied until an acceptable level of stability in the social domain was achieved” (p. 55).

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Sarkodie-Mensah (1998) indicated that culture shock, social isolation, and cross-cultural relationships can affect international students' life outside the classroom. He argued that international students may feel socially isolated if they are from cultures that encourage communal living and interpersonal interactions. They face challenges of trying to fit into a new society and make new friends while achieving their educational goals. Sometimes they have to focus solely on study which leads to isolating themselves from the social world.

Lewthwaite (1996) also found that international students spent very little time in social activities because of their priority in achieving academic goals. Besides, their perceived low English proficiency and lack of sociocultural knowledge hinder their social interactions with their American peers.

English Language Proficiency. Yeh and Inose (2003) studied over three hundred international undergraduate and graduate students in a large urban university in the Northeast. They suggest that a lack of English language proficiency is a significant predictor of acculturative distress.

Similarly, Constantine, et al. (2005) and Gebhard (2012) indicated that international students find it difficult to make friends and establish a social network with their American peers when they have limited English proficiency and lack experience and familiarity with American interactive behaviors. In Gebhard's (2010) study, some Chinese students turned down an invitation to a party by accepting the invitation with hesitancy, indicating that they likely won't be able to attend. It was because students from Asian countries use more indirect ways to reject (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004).

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Lacina (2002) also explained how language proficiency and diversity may have negative impact on international students' social interaction. She argued that many international students are academic-English-ready but not social-English ready. Therefore, their accents or unfamiliarity with idioms and slang can interfere with communication with their American peers. Sometimes issues may also arise when international students misinterpret a word or phrase due to the different meaning in their first language.

Cultural Difference. Lacina (2002) argued that cultural differences also play a role in international students' inability to form social relationships. She mentioned that "America is a highly individual-oriented society, and friendship is sometimes viewed as less permanent than in other cultures" (p. 22), which some international students may experience confusion and frustration. She also gave an example of men who are from countries that openly discriminate against women. For those men, they may find it difficult to accept women as their peers or their professors. Lacina (2002) also argued that international students "tend to view their religion as right and feel great social pressures when they believe their religious beliefs have been violated" (p. 23). It may become an issue when they need to miss classes to attend religious meetings and events.

Abe, Talbot, and Geehoed (1998) studied sixty international undergraduate and graduate students at a Midwestern university, and suggest that "students from Asian countries particularly struggle with adjustment to U.S. college life" (p. 545). It is because that the cultural distance between Asian countries and the U.S. is far. There are greater differences in culture than European and South American countries.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Summary of Social Challenges. Many international undergraduate students face challenges in social adjustment while studying in U.S. universities and colleges. Being born and raised in foreign countries, leaving families and friends, having limited English language proficiency, and experiencing cultural and religious differences all lead to difficulties in their social adjustment.

Selected Support Programs Offered by U.S. Universities

Fortunately, a great number of universities have recognized the academic and social challenges international undergraduate students face. They have reacted to issues by developing and implementing various support programs to help students overcome challenges in academic and social adjustment.

Support Programs for Academic Adjustment. The writing center should be introduced and promoted to all international students. In Sherry, Thomas & Chui's (2010) study, the vast majority of the international students they interviewed provided very positive feedback of the writing center. The writing center at Kinnucan's (2012) institution expanded its service to offer workshop series that are tailored for international students. Each session of the workshop was designed to address a specific aspect of college writing.

Many universities have also offered English writing courses to help international students improve their English writing. Kinnucan's (2012) institution developed a special topics course to cover important elements in college and graduate level English writing. Regarding the writing pedagogy, Bauer & Picciotto (2013) urged that international students need more explicit instruction and practice in a top-down approach. The dialogic and democratic pedagogy American teachers are accustomed to promoting does not work

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

effectively with international students due to their limited English proficiency and the kinds of reading and writing experiences that they have encountered in the past.

Therefore, writing teachers need to rethink their pedagogical philosophies, as well as their particular teaching practices and approaches to specific writing tasks (p. 79).

Lawrick (2013) argues that writing teaching pedagogies for students who already have a lot of experience with English reading and writing should be adjusted to build on students' previous experiences with English. He also points out that many students from Southeast Asia use a different variety of English. Thus, the writing pedagogy for this particular group should focus on adjusting their English to the English used in the U.S.

As for the content of the writing courses, He and Shi (2012) urged that subject content should be taken into consideration in English writing courses. Andrade's (2007) study demonstrates the effectiveness of a linked program. In this study, an English language course is linked to a general education (GE) course. The ESL teacher attends the GE course with the students, and uses the GE course materials to develop students' English language skills and cultural information. Results show that the GPAs of the students in the linked program are statistically the same as their English-speaking peers in most of the courses. Therefore, Andrade (2007) argues that this linked program is successful in improving international students' skills in English language as well as their understanding in subject content.

Much research has demonstrated that having native students in the same class with international students promotes mutual learning (Baiio & Ray, 2011; Chang, 2008; Miller-Cochran, 2012). Miller-Cochran (2012) presents the design and implementation of a first-year writing course in a community college where ESL students and native

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

English-speaking students are intentionally put into the same class so they can share their diverse linguistic, cultural, and social experiences and learn from each other. He argues that this cross-cultural class is great for both international and domestic students due to the linguistic and cultural diversity. It also prepares students to work in a global market in the future. Chang (2008) also argues that the engagement between domestic and international students is important. He believes that a cross-cultural class is great for both international and domestic students due to the linguistic and cultural diversity. The interaction can be facilitated through the internationalization of the curriculum by adjusting aims and objectives, assessment structure, balance between content and skills, industry relevance and workload management in curriculum development. Baiio & Ray (2011) reported on the challenges and rewards of students' interactions in a four-week international collaboration, and argued that international learning interaction was a positive experience, and students demonstrated content knowledge gain as a result of the interaction.

In order to address international undergraduate students' speaking issue, Sherry, Thomas, & Chui (2010) suggested that a social club could be created to bring together international students and domestic students, with the goal of promoting informal social interactions and improving the verbal communication skills of international students.

Although plagiarism is a big challenge for both institutions and international students, there are several best practices to help conquer it. Kinnucan's (2012) institution's writing center has developed a special topics course to cover important elements in college and graduate level English writing, including addressing the issue of plagiarism by giving specific instructions on how to cite and paraphrase. In Zimmerman's

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

(2012) institution, the library regularly held writing workshops to teach students APA and MLA styles. Some institutions have also made Refworks and EverNote available to their students, which are bibliographic citation managers that can make citations easier and more organized. Moreover, many universities have adopted Turnitin, a plagiarism-prevention service, to prevent students from plagiarizing. In addition, professors can offer incentives for students to have a librarian check their works cited page, such as giving out extra credits (Zimmerman, 2012).

Support Programs for Social Adjustment. U.S. universities can employ various ways to encourage international students to develop a positive social experience. Lacina (2002) indicated that universities can provide an international student center with advisors and counselors who can help students with common problems such as culture shock, social life, and health care. It can also organize social events for international students, which can encourage social interaction between international students and their American peers.

Polito (2013) presents the design and implementation of the Global Transition Program in his study, which is an orientation designed for international students enrolled in Fordham University in New York City. This program has a full week of events to help international students with their entry and adjustment with American education system and culture. The events include airport pickup, campus tour, academic advising meeting, English proficiency test, zoo visit, sightseeing, and shopping in NYC. Students have very positive feedback on this program. Polito (2013) states that one contributor to the success of the program is the involvement of the domestic student volunteers. “Students always speak best to fellow students,” and international students “learned the most by hanging

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

out with current students, finding out where they liked to eat in the Bronx, where they shopped in the city, and how they navigated Forham's campuses" (Polito, 2013, p. 31).

Similar to Polito (2013), Campbell's (2012) study shows the importance of utilizing domestic students as resources to help international students in their social adjustment. However, instead of an orientation for international students, he describes a buddy project at a university in which 30 domestic intercultural communication students are paired with 30 international students for a semester. The purpose is to provide social support for international students during their first few months of arrival. The results show that both international students and domestic students have very positive feedback about this project. Many international students feel that the communication helps to improve their oral English and understanding of the domestic culture, and give them confidence to talk to native English speaker. This project is also beneficial for host students because they learned "not only about the specific culture of their buddy but also about the general concepts of culture and communication" (p. 211). Many host students felt inspired as they understood more about international students and their cultures. Therefore, this buddy program not only helps international students with a smooth transition in social adjustment, but also provides domestic students a practical experience in intercultural communication, which is crucial in today's globalized world. In addition, it influences the culture of the college. With more U.S. students' knowledge about and sympathetic to the international students, the college may become more understanding and accepting of international students.

Leask's (2009) study also demonstrates the significance of promoting interactions between home and international students in order to help international students' social

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

adjustment. She presents a framework of using informal curricula for facilitating interactions between home and international students in and out of the classroom. The informal curricula refer to various extracurricular activities, including a learning guide for domestic students to understand international students' needs and cultural background, an online peer-mentoring system that matches international students and domestic students studying the same course prior to arrival, conversation groups that develop international students' social language skills, and a series of cross-cultural lunches where international and domestic students are invited to attend and engage in a range of structured cross-cultural internationals. Similar to the buddy program in Campbell's (2011) study, the Business Mates program in Leask's (2009) study also proves to help to assist new international students with the transition to the social culture of the university through facilitating interactions between students via social and learning networks (p. 216).

Besides the orientation, buddy program, the informal curricula and Business Mates program, the first-year seminar for international students in Andrade's (2006) study is effective in helping its students socially adjust to the university. The seminar is developed via the collaboration among different departments of the university. It offers four major areas, including policies and procedures of the university ESL program; university policies and American higher education; campus resources, time management, computer and study skills; and American and regional culture and appreciation for diversity. Results indicate that this seminar overall has positive effect on students' adjustment, especially to culture and university life. Students believe that this class helps them as foreigners to mingle and get to know other students, increase their understanding about American and regional culture and the diverse cultures, and become familiar with

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

the school and the difference between U.S. universities and other countries' universities (p. 94). Andrade's (2009) study has demonstrated that the first year seminar influences international students beyond their first year. Results indicate that students view the seminar positively, and think that the seminar not only helps them better adjust to the university in the first year, but the influence goes into the second year. Therefore, not only the interactions between international students and domestic students are important, but also the support from different departments within the university. This is consistent with Polito's (2013) findings, in which he asserted the one main reason for the orientation being successful is that it is campus-wide. He states that "it is best to work with all the departments of the university and draw on the particular expertise of each" (p. 31).

Sherry, Thomas, & Chui (2010) urged to raise the profile of international students on campus, enhance cross-cultural understanding, and provide greater opportunities for international students to get involved in university and local community (p. 44). Some best practices they recommended include (1) university newspapers can include more stories about international students, (2) representatives of international organizations should have a strong presence in the university and local community, (3) representatives of international students can be invited to the university to give seminars about their culture, and (4) the university website should recognize important cultural and religious holidays for international students.

According to Baker & Hawkins (2006), a project Central Queensland University has established can help address social and academic transition issues. There are five stages involved, including (1) pre-enrolment, (2) transitional orientation, (3) at risk identification, (4) monitoring academic progress, and (5) graduation. The specifically

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

designed pre-enrolment programs discuss what the degree programs of a particular university offer, as well as present in depth general information about what it will be like to study in a foreign country. A transitional orientation program is an ongoing orientation that run throughout the semester to avoid the overload of information in a traditional one-day orientation. It is crucial to identify potential at risk students as early as possible, and continuous monitoring and follow-up of students to make sure that they are staying on track. At last, an international student who has gone through this process should be able to graduate with joy.

Summary of Support Programs

Developing and implementing support programs for international undergraduate students is a great way of helping them overcome academic and social challenges and retain them in higher education institutions. Offering workshops by the writing center, English reading and writing courses developed especially for international students, linking content knowledge with language skills, and receiving help from their American peers can all help international undergraduate students overcome their academic challenges. As for social challenges, offering comprehensive and extended orientations, promoting interactions with American students through conversational club and buddy programs, offering first-year seminar are all great ways to help. Overall, international students should be viewed as valuable resource for students and staff to develop their intercultural competence.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher first presented the academic and social challenges international undergraduate students face indicated in U.S. universities and colleges.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Finding out these challenges presented in the literature is crucial in discovering and understanding the academic and social challenges Pathways students face. Then the researcher presented support programs offered by U.S. universities that can help students overcome their academic and social challenges. These programs can shed light on the effectiveness of the support Pathways program offers.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

Academic and social adjustment can be very difficult for international undergraduate students when they come to the U.S. to attend universities and colleges. Despite all the challenges international undergraduate students face, there is not much research on their struggles or issues to acclimate to U.S. universities. In fact, Pope, Mueller and Reynolds (2009) found international students to be mostly absent from the past fifty years of study affairs research. The academic and social support for international undergraduate students remains a critical issue for researchers and practitioners (Hammer, 1992; Ward, 2001; Arthur, 2004; Andrade, 2006). Moreover, there is also a dearth of studies on programs that provide comprehensive support (academic and social) for international undergraduate students. Similarly, although the Pathways Program has been running for four years, no formal studies have been conducted to examine the effectiveness of the program. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the perceived academic and social barriers and opportunities of international undergraduate students participating in the Pathways Program. The results of this research helped to determine the effectiveness of the Pathways Program in its efforts to assist international students who need additional English language training with their academic and social adjustment. It clarified which support services should be developed and emphasized in similar full-admission undergraduate programs for international students.

The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What academic and social challenges do Pathways students face?

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

- a. Do Pathways students from different countries have different academic and social challenges during their first semester at the university?
2. How does the Pathways Program support its students to overcome their academic and social challenges?
 - a. How does tutoring support Pathways students in their academic studies?
 - b. How does a specially designed curriculum support Pathways students in their academic studies?
 - c. What impact does the Pathways Program have on students' freshmen year academic achievement (GPA)?
 - d. How do social events support Pathways students in their social adjustment?
3. What effect does the Pathways Program have on students' first year retention?

In this chapter, this researcher will specify the site and population for the study explain the research design and rationale, present the procedures for carrying out the study, provide an anticipated timeline of the study, and discuss any ethical considerations.

Site and Population

Population Description

The purpose of this study was to explore whether the Pathways Program supports international students in overcoming their academic challenges, with the sampling including all previous and current Pathways students. From 2012-2014, there were three cohorts of Pathways students with ten students in each cohort. In fall of 2015, five new

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

students were enrolled in the Pathways Program. The enrollment has experienced a recent decline due to restructuring leadership transitions in Enrollment Services and a reduction in international recruitment at the institution. Therefore, the total sample size for the survey is thirty-five students. Only new Pathways students from the 2015 cohort took the English proficiency test. Thus, the sample size for the test is five. Stratified random sampling was employed for the focus groups. Stratified sampling occurs when the researcher divides the population into subgroups such that each unit belongs to a single stratum and then selects units from those strata (Teddle & Yu, 2007). In this study, the sample was stratified based on Pathways students' country of origin. At this point, the strata for students' country of origin included Saudi Arabia, China and Vietnam, and Eastern European countries. All students in each stratum had the same chance of being selected. Each focus group consisted of three or four students.

Site Description

The university where this study was conducted is a private, Roman Catholic university located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It was founded by the Christian Brothers in 1863. The university offers over 50 undergraduate majors and 29 graduate programs. In the 2014-2015 academic year, the university had a total enrollment of 6,438, about 68.5% (4,409) of whom are undergraduates (U.S. News, n.d.). The total number of faculty is approximately 590, with about 42% full-time appointments. In the 2010-2015 university's strategic plan, one of the top priorities is expanding international programs and providing better retention services for international students. As of fall 2014, the total number of international students was 155, which was less than 3% of the entire students

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

population. The goal is to increase the number of international students to 10% of student population by 2020.

Site Access

The research was conducted at the author's workplace. Thus, there was no issue accessing the site. The researcher was able to gain access to each Pathways student's 1st year GPA through the Software Applications Administrator at the site university. Meanwhile, the Assistant Director of Institutional Effectiveness at the site university had records of all other international students' (non-Pathways international students) 1st year GPA, and he shared the information with the researcher for the purpose of this research.

Research Design and Rationale

This research design is a single case study. A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Ying, 1981). One of the rationales for single-case study design is to represent a typical case or a unique circumstance (Ying, 2003). The Pathways program is both a typical and unique case. It is typical because many U.S. universities and colleges have bridge programs, most of which allow international undergraduate students to take 3-8 credits in undergraduate level courses and several non-credit intensive English courses during their first semester or first year of studies before they become full-time university students. However, the majority of bridge programs do not offer full admission to their students. Thus, international undergraduate students enrolled in those bridge programs are not full-time undergraduate students but English language students. Not many bridge programs offer

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

comprehensive support for their students either. What is unique about the Pathways Program is that it not only offers full admission to eligible students with scholarship money, but also provides free comprehensive academic and social support throughout students' first year at the university. The Pathways Program has many decisions to make in determining how to support students, which programs to emphasize, and "the essence of a case study is to illuminate a decision or set decisions; why they were taken; how they were implemented; and with what results" (Schramm, 1971). Thus, the purpose of this study is to find out why Pathways students need support, how the program offers support, and what results the support has yielded.

One of the principles of data collection for a case study is to use multiple sources of evidence to triangulate converging lines of inquiry and strengthen construct validity (Yin, 2003). Thus, the researcher employed a convergent mixed methods research design in this study. A convergent mixed methods design is to "simultaneously collect both quantitative and qualitative data, merge the data, and use the results to understand a research problem" (Creswell, 2011, p. 540). This research design helps the researcher to triangulate findings from quantitative data and qualitative data in order that they may mutually be corroborated (Bryman, 2006). A more complete understanding of a research problem results from collecting both quantitative and qualitative data because "one data collection form supplies strengths to offset the weakness of the other form" (Creswell, 2011, p. 540). This research project collected both quantitative and qualitative measures to best assess and triangulate about the issues international undergraduate students face and the supports they maximize to overcome these issues.

Research Methods

This case study design included a survey, focus group interviews, and a diagnostic English proficiency test. In addition, first year GPAs and retention rates were analyzed by comparing Pathways and non-Pathways international students.

Description of Each Method Used

Survey. A survey was sent out to thirty-five former and current Pathways students. The survey for this research was adapted from the survey of international undergraduate students' first-year challenges at the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities (Anderson, Godfrey, Isensee, Martin & O'Brien, 2012) and the survey of Wilson's (2011) research on sociocultural adaptation of international graduate students at a Northeastern university in the U.S. The researcher received permission from authors of both studies to use their surveys.

Anderson et al's survey was initially piloted on non-native English-speaking students and staff members who provided feedback on content and clarity, which was taken into consideration to design the final survey. Wilson's survey was likewise pilot-tested for clarity and ease of understanding with Asian international graduate students and a domestic graduate student from another institution. Her revised survey was reviewed by the Dean of International Programs and Development, and the Director of Immigration Affairs at the site university of her research.

The researcher combined the two surveys, and made some changes to both survey's items. Repetitive items were removed, while other items were adapted to better fit the purpose of this study. In order to verify the reliability and validity of this new

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

survey, the researcher implemented the same protocol, including piloting, receiving feedback, revising, and reviewing. The survey used in the study consisted of six background questions (questions B1-B6), two multiple-choice items, three open-ended questions, and two five point Likert-scales. Questions A1-A3 focused on Pathways students' academic difficulties in their first semester at the university. The first five point Likert-scale ranged from "No Difficulty" to "Extreme Difficulty" focused on Pathways students' social difficulties in their first semester at the university. The second five point Likert-scale ranged from "Not Helpful" to "Extremely Helpful", and questions P7-P8 focused on the helpfulness of the services Pathways Program offers. The full survey is included in Appendix A.

All thirty-five former and current Pathways students were contacted through the institution's email system. All students' email addresses were publically available in the university. The initial invitation email was sent out on December 1 2015. The invitation explained the research study and called for participation. Items in the initial email included the aims of the research, the potential significance, the potential benefits of the research to the institution and students, the research plan and method, the participants, and the consent form. The researcher noted in this email that students who complete and return the survey on time will be entered a lottery to win a \$50 Starbucks gift card. Students confirmed participation by replying to the initial email and returning the consent form. Once participation was confirmed and consent forms were collected, the second email was sent out with the link to the survey to all participants. A final reminder to complete the survey was sent out in the beginning of February 2016.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Focus Groups. All thirty-five former and current Pathways students were invited to participate in the focus group interviews. The initial invitation email was sent out to all thirty-five former and current Pathways students during the third week of January 2016 to provide full disclosure of the purpose of the research with the consent form, and call for participation in focus groups. It was noted in the email that students who participate in the interview will be entered a lottery to win a \$100 Starbucks gift card. The second invitation email was sent during the first week of February, and the final reminder was sent during the last week of February 2016.

Students confirmed participation by responding to the researcher's email. Once participation was confirmed, the sample was stratified based on Pathways students' country of origin. Three focus group interviews were conducted with students from China and Vietnam (as one group), European countries, and Saudi Arabia. On February 1 2016, the first focus group interview with three Chinese and one Vietnamese student was conducted. The second interview was conducted on February 17 2016 with three students from European countries. The third and final interview was conducted on February 24 2016 with three students from Saudi Arabia.

There were fifteen questions for the focus group interviews. The questions for focus group sessions were derived from the literature, which focused on Pathways students' academic and social difficulties in their first year at the university, and the effectiveness of the services Pathways Program offered. The questions were piloted for clarity and ease of understanding in Spring 2015 with international students who were studying at the English Language Institute at the site university. The final interview questions were revised and reviewed by the Assistant Vice Provost of International

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Education at the site university. The focus group interview questions are included in Appendix B.

Tests. A diagnostic English proficiency test was administrated to the five students in 2015 Pathways cohort at the beginning of Fall 2015 semester and the end of Fall 2015 semester to examine their English language proficiency. This test was the English Language Institute Testing and Certificate Division at the University of Michigan – English Placement Test (CaMLA-EPT). It had three different forms (D, E, and F). CaMLA test can examine students’ English listening, grammar, vocabulary and reading skills. It is a 60-minute test of 80 multiple choice questions, including 25 in listening, 20 in grammar, 20 in vocabulary, and 15 in reading. An additional writing tests were given to the students along with the CaMLA test. The writing test was the TOEFL (Test of English of Foreign Languages) writing test.

According to Walter & Hentschel (2013) in the test development report, the CaMLA-EPT is “a test of general receptive language proficiency, assessing listening comprehension, use of English (vocabulary and grammar), and reading comprehension. The items are situated in a variety of language domains: educational, social, occupational, and personal. There are three unique forms, constructed so that they are parallel in content and in difficulty” (p. 1). CaMLA-EPT has gone through the several steps to become a reliable and valid test, including test design, compiling the pilot test forms, pilot testing design, analyzing pilot testing results, and constructing the final test.

On September 1 2015 the CaMLA-EPT Form D test along with a TOEFL writing test was administered to the five students in 2015 Pathways cohort. Then on December 1

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

2015, the CaMLA-EPT Form E test along with another TOEFL writing test was administered to the same students. Both tests were administered during INST 105 class time. Both CaMLA tests and writing tests were scored for accuracy and validity by the same two ESL instructors from the English Language Institute of the site university. The researcher collected test scores for analysis.

GPA and Retention Rate. First year GPA of each student from Pathways cohorts 2012, 2013, and 2014 was collected. Each Pathways student's 1st year GPA was accessed through the Software Applications Administrator at the site university. Meanwhile, the Assistant Director of Institutional Effectiveness at the site university had records of all other international students' (non-Pathways international students) 1st year GPA, and he shared the information with the researcher for the purpose of this research.

The retention rate of Pathways cohorts 2012, 2013, and 2014 was also calculated. Since the Pathways Program is a freshmen-year program, the retention refers to the number of students retained after their freshmen year. Each Pathways student's enrollment status (whether they are enrolled, taking a leave of absence, left the program, or other) was accessed through the Software Applications Administrator at the site university. Meanwhile, the Assistant Director of Institutional Effectiveness at the site university had records of all other international students' (non-Pathways international students) enrollment status, and he shared the information with the researcher for the purpose of this research.

Data analysis procedures

Survey. The data analysis on the quantitative phase of the survey was carried out via outputs on SurveyMonkey. The qualitative portion of the data from the survey was

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

coded by open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), which uses the participants' actual words or ideas to allow the themes to emerge inductively (Patton, 2002). In the first round of coding, general themes emerged. In subsequent rounds of coding, themes were refined and then ranked according to frequency. Appendix C shows how each survey question is in relation to the research questions.

Focus Groups. All interviews were audio recorded entirely. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher. The transcribed text became the data that were analyzed.

Initial codes were first created to describe data. Comments and reflections were added as memos during initial coding. Second, patterns, themes, relationships and sequences were identified and categorized. After connecting and interrelating data, themes were generalized and classified. Finally, generalizations to the body of knowledge were linked with the construct theory for interpretation (Hoyos & Barnes, 2012). Appendix C shows how each focus group interview question relates to the research questions.

Tests. Both CaMLA tests and writing tests were scored for accuracy and validity by the same two ESL instructors from the English Language Institute of the site university. The CaMLA test score and writing score for each student at the beginning and end of the semester was compared to evaluate if there was an improvement on their English language proficiency. It also determined if Pathways Program's supports were a possible source of this improvement.

GPA and Retention Rate. First-year GPAs for Pathways students were compared with all other international undergraduate students' freshman year GPA; additionally, retention rates for Pathways students were compared with their non-

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Pathways international undergraduate counterparts to see if there were significant differences between these two groups, and determine if possibly Pathways Program supported the GPA and retention rate differences.

Stages of Data Collection

Survey: The initial invitation email was sent out on December 1 2015, which explained the research study and called for participation. Students confirmed participation by replying to the initial email and returning the consent form. Once participation was confirmed and consent forms were collected, a second email with the link to the survey was sent to all participants. A final reminder of completing the survey was sent out in the beginning of February 2016.

Focus Groups. All former and current Pathways students received an initial invitation email during the third week of January 2016 to call for participation in focus groups. The second invitation email was sent during the first week of February, and the final reminder was sent during the last week of February 2016. On February 1 2016, three Chinese and one Vietnamese student participated in the first focus group interview. The second interview was conducted on February 17 2016 with three students from European countries. The third and final interview was conducted on February 24 2016 with three students from Saudi Arabia.

Tests. On September 1 2015, the five students in the 2015 Pathways cohort completed the CaMLA-EPT Form D test along with a TOEFL writing test. Then on December 1 2015, the same students completed the CaMLA-EPT Form E test along with another TOEFL writing test. Both tests were administered during INST 105 class time.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

GPA and Retention Rate. The first year GPA of each student from Pathways cohorts 2012, 2013, and 2014 was collected. Access was available through the Software Applications Administrator at the site university. Meanwhile, the Assistant Director of Institutional Effectiveness at the site university had records of all other international students' (non-Pathways international students) 1st year GPA, and he shared the information with the researcher for the purpose of this research study.

Using the retention data, retention rates were calculated for the Pathways cohorts of 2012, 2013, and 2014. Since the Pathways Program is a freshmen-year program, the retention rate refers to the number of students returning after their freshman year. Each Pathways student's enrollment status (whether they are enrolled, taking a leave of absence, left the program, or other) was accessed through the Software Applications Administrator at the site university. Meanwhile, the Assistant Director of Institutional Effectiveness at the site university had records of all other international students' (non-Pathways international students) enrollment status, and he shared the information with the researcher for the purpose of this research study.

Ethical Considerations

Subjects' participation in this research study was completely voluntary. The focus group interview questions did not contain any sensitive topics. Therefore, this research may benefit future students without causing any harm to the participants. In order to ensure students' rights were protected and no harm would come to participants, participants were provided with an informed consent form that clearly stated the purposes and procedures that was used, and provided them with an opportunity to opt out of the study if they so desired. IRB approval was granted to conduct this research.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

One ethical concern was that the researcher taught in the Pathways Program so all participants were either current or former students of the researcher. Some participants might feel pressured to give socially desirable responses to certain questions. One way to address this issue was to make it very clear to participants at the beginning of the focus group interviews that they could reserve the rights to choose how much information to disclose about themselves depending upon the subject matter, and they could choose to opt out of questions they were not comfortable answering. Participants who were current students of the researcher were informed that their grades would not be affected at all by their answers. Since there was a potential language and cultural barrier, the researcher presented a document in both English and the students' native language to explain their rights as participants to ensure their full understanding. This way, participants were encouraged to feel more comfortable sharing their experiences and answering questions honestly.

The second ethical concern was that some participants might feel nervous due to the student-teacher relationship with the researcher. According to Creswell (2012), it is important to conduct the study while students are not fatigued and nervous because it may interfere with the reliability of the data if students are experiencing any of these conditions. Therefore, it is important to make the atmosphere comfortable and relaxing for the participants. There were several methods used to address this issue. Participants chose the interview location that was most convenient and comfortable for them, and light refreshments were provided during the interviews. Moreover, there was the concern of conflicts of interest. As an employee of the institution where the Pathways Program was developed and implemented, the researcher may feel reluctant to share any negative

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

results due to the interest of the university. However, serious problems arise when research bias occurs. It would not only hurt the integrity of the research but also the reputation of the researcher and the institution. Therefore, the researcher would honestly share all results of the study, both positive and negative.

All participants for the survey and focus group interviews were confidential and their names or identities will not be revealed in the study. Their information will be kept in a locked computer that will only be accessible by the researcher. The researcher will be the only one who conducts the interviews and collects data. The interview results will not be used for any other purposes beyond this study. All documents related to this study will be kept in the regulatory binder for a minimum of three years from study closure.

Summary

This chapter presented the research methodology used for this case study research, which is a mixed method including both qualitative and quantitative. In this research, a survey was used for all former and current Pathways students, three focus group interviews were conducted with volunteer participants from the Pathways Program, and two CaMLA tests for 2015 Pathways cohort were administrated. Additionally, data on all international undergraduate students' first-year GPA and retention at the site university were collected. The findings will be reported in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Finding, Results, and Interpretations

This study aims to explore the perceived academic and social barriers and opportunities of international undergraduate students participating in the Pathways Program at a private, Roman Catholic university located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The Pathways Program at the site university is a unique undergraduate program for international students, and the only one of its kind offered in the tri-state area (New Jersey, Delaware, and Pennsylvania). The Pathways Program is designed specifically for international students who are academically qualified but with lower TOEFL or IELTS scores (university regular undergraduate admission requirement: TOEFL 79 or IELTS 6.5; Pathways admission requirement: TOEFL 64 or IELTS 5.5). What is unique about the Pathways Program is that it not only offers full admissions to eligible students with scholarship money, but also provides free comprehensive academic and social support throughout students' first year at the university. Pathways students graduate in four years, like other regular undergraduate students in U.S. universities and colleges. Although a great number of U.S. universities and colleges offer "bridge programs" for international students who lack English language skills, most do not accept students into their full-time undergraduate programs during the "bridge period". Traditional "bridge programs" only allow international students to take 3-8 credits undergraduate level courses in their first semester or first year of studies, yet these students have to take several non-credit intensive English courses before they are accepted into a full-time undergraduate program. Therefore, international students enrolled in traditional "bridge programs" are not considered full-time undergraduate students but English language students, and cannot graduate within four years. Moreover, very few traditional "bridge programs"

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

offer comprehensive support, such as free tutoring and social activities, for their students. Furthermore, students who receive full admission have a greater opportunity to obtain a student visa for study than students who receive admission to a non-credit English language program. Table 4.1 highlights the major differences between the Pathways Program and a traditional “bridge program”.

The Pathways Program vs. a Traditional “Bridge Program”						
	Full-Admission to Undergraduate Programs	Scholarship	Free Academic Support	Free Social Support	Graduate in 4 Years	Non-Credit English Language Courses
Pathways Program	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Traditional “Bridge Program”	No	No	No	No	No	Yes

Table 4.1 Pathways Program vs. a Traditional “Bridge Program”

Furthermore, the Pathways Program is one of the most important initiatives for the site university to increase international recruitment. The university has over 150 years of history, but its international student population never exceeded 1% of the total student population. It has always been known as a university for white, middle class students from the region. However as increasing cultural and financial contributions from international students, the university has embarked on a massive effort of recruiting international students since 2011. The university hopes that the development of the Pathways Program becomes an innovative “bridge program” that offers full-admission with scholarship money to international students who lack English language proficiency, and as a result can attract more international students to the university. The university also hopes that the Pathways Program provides academic and social supports for international students who need more English language training to adapt and learn in in a

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

structured environment that is specifically tailored to their unique needs during their first year at the university. Therefore, it is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of the Pathways Program's services to determine whether it meets its purpose and identify areas of improvement.

Thus, the results of this research will help to determine the effectiveness of the Pathways Program in its efforts to assist international students who need additional English language training with their academic and social adjustment. It will also clarify which support services should be developed and emphasized in similar full-admission undergraduate programs for international students. If designed properly, the format of this innovative "bridge program" would maximize campus resources and better support academic and social success of such international students. It would also help them save a considerable amount of time and money in their studies at U.S. universities and colleges.

Findings of this study are presented below through the analysis of surveys, focus group interviews, tests, GPA, and retention rate.

Findings

Survey. The survey was designed to determine the academic and social challenges Pathways students face, and evaluate whether the Pathways Program supports them in overcoming those challenges. Participants received the initial invitation email on December 1, 2015, which explained the research study and called for participation. They confirmed participation by replying to the initial email and returning the consent form. Once participation was confirmed and consent forms was collected, participants received the link to the survey on SurveyMonkey. A final reminder of completing the survey was sent out in the beginning of February 2016.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

The survey was divided into four sections. The first section (B1-B6) collected information on student demographics. The second section focused on participants' academic adjustment and included three parts: Part one (A1) asked respondents to check all the academic difficulties that applied to them in the first semester; Part two (A2) asked respondents to indicate additional academic difficulties they faced in the first semester; and part three (A3) asked who they preferred to get help from when they had any questions about the material or assignments. The third section (S1-S14) focused on social adjustment, and was comprised of a five-point Likert scale asking respondents to indicate how much social difficulty they experienced in their first semester. The fourth section included three parts: Part one (P1-P6) asked respondents to rate Pathways Program's services on a five-point Likert scale; Part two (P7) asked respondents to provide brief explanations for their rating; and part three (P8) asked for future recommendations for the Pathways Program. The findings are presented below corresponding to each section of the survey.

1. Student Demographics

The first section of the survey collected information on student demographics. Eighteen former and current Pathways students participated in the survey. Although the survey sample was somewhat limited, the respondents represented a diverse group in terms of age, school, and nationality. Table 4.2 summarizes the demographics of the respondents.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Survey Respondent Demographics			
Category	Items	Count	Percentage (%)
Age (Years)	18-20	8	44
	21-23	8	44
	24-26	2	11
	26 or older	0	0
School	Arts and Sciences	6	33
	Business	12	67
	Nursing and Health Services	0	0
Time Studied in the U.S. (Months)	0-12	3	17
	13-24	4	22
	25-36	3	17
	More than 36	6	33
	More than 48	2	11
Status Entering the University	Freshman	14	78
	Transfer student	0	0
	English language program student	4	22
Gender	Male	6	33
	Female	12	67
Country of Origin	China	6	33
	Saudi Arabia	5	28
	Vietnam	2	11
	Italy	1	6
	Ukraine	1	6
	Serbia	1	6
	Norway	1	6
	Nicaragua	1	6

Table 4.2 Survey Respondent Demographics

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

2. Academic Adjustment

In part one (A1) of the second section of the survey, respondents (N=18) were asked the academic difficulties they faced in their first semester at the university. The number of responses and the percentage of responses for each item are listed in table 4.3. The table of responses are arranged in descending order from highest percentage to lowest percentage. Item letters correspond to the ones from the survey.

Academic Difficulties in the First Semester (N=18)		
Item	Count	Percentage (%)
a) Too much of the vocabulary was unfamiliar.	13	72
f) I wasn't comfortable speaking during pair work or group work.	11	61
i) I couldn't understand the reading material.	11	61
m) My writing had too many grammar errors.	11	61
h) There was too much reading.	10	56
n) I was not comfortable speaking in class because of my English.	9	50
c) Professors/instructors spoke too quickly.	8	44
o) People could not understand me when I spoke.	8	44
k) I was unfamiliar with the types of writing assignments.	6	33
l) I did not know (or knew very little) about plagiarism.	5	28
r) There was too much homework.	5	28
d) The professors/instructors didn't provide enough visual material (e.g. writing on the board or PowerPoint slides) while teaching.	4	22
q) I was not familiar with the types of assignments given in class.	4	22
b) Too many examples used in class were taken from U.S. culture.	3	17
j) The directions given for writing assignments were unclear to me.	3	17
e) I wasn't clear about what to do during pair work or group work.	2	11
g) I didn't understand other students during pair work or group work.	2	11
p) I couldn't understand my classmates.	2	11

Table 4.3 Academic Difficulties in the First Semester

The top four challenges for these students that emerged from this question were unfamiliar vocabulary, discomfort in speaking, reading comprehension, and writing difficulty.

These items were then segregated based on respondents' geographical region of origin to determine whether students from different countries have different academic challenges. The counts and percentages of responses of students from China and Vietnam

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

(N=8) are listed in table 4.4. The counts and percentages of responses of students from Saudi Arabia (N=5) are listed in table 4.5. The counts and percentages of responses of students from Europe (N=4) are listed in table 4.6. These survey items are listed in descending order from highest to lowest response percentage. Item letters correspond to question numbers from the survey. Items not included in the tables indicate that no students from that region chose them.

Academic Difficulties in the First Semester – China & Vietnam (N=8)		
Item	Count	Percentage (%)
i) I couldn't understand the reading material.	6	75
m) My writing had too many grammar errors.	6	75
a) Too much of the vocabulary was unfamiliar.	5	62.5
h) There was too much reading.	5	62.5
f) I wasn't comfortable speaking during pair work or group work.	3	37.5
o) People could not understand me when I spoke.	3	37.5
c) Professors/instructors spoke too quickly.	2	25
k) I was unfamiliar with the types of writing assignments.	2	25
n) I was not comfortable speaking in class because of my English.	2	25
b) Too many examples used in class were taken from U.S. culture.	1	12.5
d) The professors/instructors didn't provide enough visual material (e.g. writing on the board or PowerPoint slides) while teaching.	1	12.5%
j) The directions given for writing assignments were unclear to me.	1	12.5%
l) I did not know (or knew very little) about plagiarism.	1	12.5%
p) I couldn't understand my classmates.	1	12.5%
q) I was not familiar with the types of assignments given in class.	1	12.5%

Table 4.4 Academic Difficulties in the First Semester – China & Vietnam

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Academic Difficulties in the First Semester – Saudi Arabia (N=5)		
Item	Count	Percentage (%)
f) I wasn't comfortable speaking during pair work or group work.	5	100
a) Too much of the vocabulary was unfamiliar.	4	80
c) Professors/instructors spoke too quickly.	4	80
m) My writing had too many grammar errors.	3	60
n) I was not comfortable speaking in class because of my English.	3	60
r) There was too much homework.	3	60
b) Too many examples used in class were taken from U.S. culture.	2	40
g) I didn't understand other students during pair work or group work.	2	40
h) There was too much reading.	2	40
i) I couldn't understand the reading material.	2	40
k) I was unfamiliar with the types of writing assignments.	2	40
l) I did not know (or knew very little) about plagiarism.	2	40
o) People could not understand me when I spoke.	2	40
d) The professors/instructors didn't provide enough visual material (e.g. writing on the board or PowerPoint slides) while teaching.	1	20
e) I wasn't clear about what to do during pair work or group work.	1	20
j) The directions given for writing assignments were unclear to me.	1	20
p) I couldn't understand my classmates.	1	20
q) I was not familiar with the types of assignments given in class.	1	20

Table 4.5 Academic Difficulties in the First Semester – Saudi Arabia

Academic Difficulties in the First Semester – Europe (N=4)		
Item	Count	Percentage (%)
a) Too much of the vocabulary was unfamiliar.	3	75
n) I was not comfortable speaking in class because of my English.	3	75
f) I wasn't comfortable speaking during pair work or group work.	2	50
h) There was too much reading.	2	50
i) I couldn't understand the reading material.	2	50
k) I was unfamiliar with the types of writing assignments.	2	50
l) I did not know (or knew very little) about plagiarism.	2	50
o) People could not understand me when I spoke.	2	50
q) I was not familiar with the types of assignments given in class.	2	50
c) Professors/instructors spoke too quickly.	1	25
d) The professors/instructors didn't provide enough visual material (e.g. writing on the board or PowerPoint slides) while teaching.	1	25
e) I wasn't clear about what to do during pair work or group work.	1	25
j) The directions given for writing assignments were unclear to me.	1	25
m) My writing had too many grammar errors.	1	25
r) There was too much homework.	1	25

Table 4.6 Academic Difficulties in the First Semester – Europe

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

According to the survey responses (as shown in table 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6), all three groups of respondents chose unfamiliar vocabulary (item “a”) and discomfort in speaking during pair/group work (item “f”) as the top academic difficulties in the first semester. Two of the three groups of respondents also identified reading comprehension (item “i”), writing difficulty (item “m”), discomfort in speaking in class (item “n”), and too much reading (item “h”) as academic challenges. Although respondents from different countries showed some variance in identifying their academic difficulties, there was some overlap in the academic challenges of unfamiliar vocabulary, discomfort in speaking, reading comprehension, and writing difficulty.

In addition to the academic difficulties identified in part one (A1), Pathways students also identified in part two (A2) the lack of background/content knowledge in specific content areas like American Literature or American History as another academic difficulty.

In part three (A3), respondents indicated their preferred source of help when they faced challenges. The counts and percentages of responses to this question are listed in table 4.7. The table is arranged in descending order from highest percentage to lowest percentage. Item letters correspond to the ones from the survey.

Answer	Count	Percentage (%)
a) The professor	13	72
b) Classmates	9	50
c) Pathways tutor	8	44
d) Subject or writing center tutors	8	44
e) The academic advisor	1	6
f) Other teammates/assistant coach	1	6
g) Mother/sister	1	6

Table 4.7 Preferred People to Get Help From

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

The majority of respondents preferred to get help from their professors in the first semester. Thus, professors play an important role in Pathways students' studies.

Professors may not be able to offer appropriate support if they do not have experience with teaching international students with developing English proficiency and/or limited content/background knowledge, which could make learning difficult for international students.

3. Social Adjustment

In the third section of the survey, respondents were asked to rate how difficult certain social challenges were during their first semester using a five-point Likert scale.

The response frequencies, means, and standard deviations of the 14 items from the survey are reported in table 4.8. Item numbers correspond to item numbers from the survey. The table is arranged in descending order from highest mean score to lowest mean score.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Social Difficulties by Item: Frequencies, Percentages, Means, and SD (N=18)							
Item	No Difficulty 1	Slight Difficulty 2	Moderate Difficulty 3	Great Difficulty 4	Extreme Difficulty 5	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
S3 Understanding jokes and humor	1 (5.6%)	4 (22.2%)	7 (38.9%)	2 (11.1%)	4 (22.2%)	3.22	1.22
S1 Making American friends	2 (11.1%)	5 (27.8%)	4 (22.2%)	3 (16.7%)	4 (22.2%)	3.11	1.37
S9 Living independently away from family members	3 (16.7%)	4 (22.2%)	4 (22.2%)	2 (11.1%)	5 (27.8%)	3.11	1.49
S2 Going to social events or gatherings	2 (11.1%)	5 (27.8%)	5 (27.8%)	4 (22.2%)	2 (11.1%)	2.94	1.21
S14 Adapting to American etiquette	4 (22.2%)	4 (22.2%)	6 (33.3%)	2 (%)	2 (%)	2.67	1.28
S4 Understanding ethnic or cultural differences	4 (22.2%)	6 (33.3%)	4 (22.2%)	4 (22.2%)	0 (0%)	2.44	1.10
S10 Finding food you enjoy	7 (38.9%)	3 (16.7%)	3 (16.7%)	4 (22.2%)	1 (5.6%)	2.39	1.38
S13 Dealing with the climate	7 (38.9%)	2 (11.1%)	6 (33.3%)	3 (16.7%)	0 (0%)	2.28	1.18
S8 Adapting to housing accommodations	8 (44.4%)	4 (22.2%)	3 (16.7%)	1 (5.6%)	2 (11.1%)	2.17	1.38
S5 Navigating campus	7 (38.9%)	6 (33.3%)	3 (16.7%)	0 (0%)	2 (11.1%)	2.11	1.28
S7 Dealing with faculty and staff at the university	9 (50.0%)	5 (27.8%)	3 (16.7%)	0 (0%)	1 (5.6%)	1.83	1.10
S6 Following university rules and regulations	11 (61.1%)	4 (22.2%)	2 (11.1%)	1 (5.6%)	0 (0%)	1.61	0.92
S12 Going to coffee shops, restaurants, fast food places	12 (66.7%)	2 (11.1%)	3 (16.7%)	1 (5.6%)	0 (0%)	1.61	0.98
S11 Going shopping	12 (66.7%)	4 (22.2%)	1 (5.6%)	1 (5.6%)	0 (0%)	1.50	0.86

Table 4.8 Social Difficulties by Item: Frequencies, Percentages, Means, and SD

The top four most difficult social challenges for these students that emerged from this question were understanding jokes and humor, making American friends, living independently away from family members, and going to social events/gatherings. Again,

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

these items were segregated based on respondents' geographical region of origin in order to analyze whether certain groups of participants from different regions faced higher levels of social differences than others. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed. The results are listed in table 4.9.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Social Difficulties by Geographic Region (China & Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, Europe) (N=17)									
Items	China & Vietnam (N=8)		Saudi Arabia (N=5)		Europe (N=4)		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Summary of Significant Differences
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
S1 Making American friends	2.88	1.25	3.80	1.10	2.25	1.50	1.740	.211	SND
S2 Going to social events or gatherings	2.75	1.49	2.80	0.84	3.00	0.82	0.059	.943	SND
S3 Understanding jokes and humor	3.13	1.46	3.40	1.14	2.75	0.50	0.316	.734	SND
S4 Understanding ethnic or cultural differences	2.25	1.04	2.80	1.30	2.25	1.26	0.392	.683	SND
S5 Navigating campus	2.25	1.39	2.40	1.67	1.75	0.50	0.281	.759	SND
S6 Following university rules and regulations	1.50	1.07	2.00	0.71	1.50	1.00	0.475	.631	SND
S7 Dealing with faculty and staff at the university	2.00	1.41	1.60	0.89	1.50	0.58	0.330	.724	SND
S8 Adapting to housing accommodations	1.88	1.46	1.80	1.30	2.50	0.58	0.409	.672	SND
S9 Living independently away from family members	2.25	1.39	4.2	0.84	3.00	1.41	3.673	.052	SND
S10 Finding food you enjoy	1.88	1.25	2.8	1.30	2.5	1.73	0.749	.491	SND
S11 Going shopping	1.5	0.76	1.00	0.00	2.25	1.25	2.788	.096	SND
S12 Going to coffee shops, restaurants, fast food places	1.63	0.92	1.20	0.45	2.25	1.50	1.281	.308	SND

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

S13 Dealing with the climate	2.13	1.25	2.80	0.84	1.50	1.00	1.593	.238	SND
S14 Adapting to American etiquette	2.25	1.28	3.20	1.10	2.25	0.96	1.170	.339	SND

Table 4.9 Social Difficulties by Geographic Region (China & Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, Europe)

SND= No Significant Difference.

Using the Bonferroni adjustment, required significance at $p < .05$.

Post-hoc Scheffe mean difference is significant at the $p=.05$ level.

Responses: 1: No Difficulty, 2=Slight Difficulty, 3=Moderate Difficulty, 4=Great Difficulty, and 6=Extreme Difficulty.

The test showed no significant differences among the three geographic groups of Pathways students. Thus all Pathways students faced similar social difficulties in their first semester at the university.

4. *Pathways Program Services*

In addition to identifying academic and social challenges, in part one of section (P1-P6), respondents were also asked to rate the level of helpfulness of Pathways Program's support services using a Likert scale where 1 represented not helpful and 5 represented extremely helpful. The response frequencies, means, and standard deviations of the six items from the survey are reported in table 4.10. Item numbers correspond to item numbers from the survey. This table is arranged in descending order from highest mean score to lowest mean score.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Helpfulness of Services by Item: Frequencies, Percentages, Means, and SD (N=18)							
Item	Not <u>Helpful</u> 1	Slightly <u>Helpful</u> 2	Moderately <u>Helpful</u> 3	Greatly <u>Helpful</u> 4	Extremely <u>Helpful</u> 5	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
P1 INST 105 & 106 (INST 170 & 171)	0 (0%)	1 (5.6%)	3 (16.7%)	10 (55.6%)	4 (22.2%)	3.94	0.80
P4 Academic advising	1 (5.6%)	1 (5.6%)	7 (38.9%)	1 (5.6%)	8 (44.4%)	3.78	1.26
P2 Weekly one-on-one tutoring	1 (5.6%)	3 (16.7%)	2 (11.1%)	7 (38.9%)	5 (27.8%)	3.67	1.24
P3 Study group sessions	0 (0%)	3 (16.7%)	6 (33.3%)	3 (16.7%)	6 (33.3%)	3.67	1.14
P5 Social activities	1 (5.6%)	3 (16.7%)	4 (22.2%)	7 (38.9%)	3 (16.7%)	3.44	1.15
P6 Pathways Orientation	4 (22.2%)	1 (5.6%)	5 (27.8%)	2 (11.1%)	6 (33.3%)	3.28	1.56

Table 4.10 Helpfulness of Services by Item: Frequencies, Percentages, Means, and SD

The means signify the helpfulness of Pathways Program's services rated by the respondents and ranged from a high of 3.94 (INST 105&106) to a low of 3.28 (Pathways orientation). Thus, all services the Pathways Program offers were rated averagely moderately helpful to greatly helpful.

In part two of section four (P7), respondents were then asked to provide a brief explanation of their rating on each Pathways Program's service. Their comments are summarized in table 4.11.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Explanations of the Rating in the Survey	
Services	Explanations from the Survey
(P1) INST 105&106	<i>Make Friends</i> a. "It was a fun class and it gives us a chance to get to know each other better. This is like a friendship foundation for me because I found my best friends through that class." b. [INST helped me] "make international friends when first arrived."
	<i>Adjust to American Culture</i> c. [INST helped me] "understand the culture of the US."
	<i>Improve English Language Skills</i> d. "It was helpful how they accommodated assignments and helped throughout the writing process." e. "In this class, I learned a lot of new vocabulary words and improved my reading and writing skills. In addition to that, this class helped me to increase my confidence with my speaking skills." f. "It was helpful with essays and vocabulary, and to understand readings better."
(P2) Weekly One-On-One Tutoring	<i>Benefits:</i> g. "They were extremely helpful, helping me with papers, helping me understand readings, keeping me on task." h. "The tutoring was very helpful in making my assignments to be completed in the best way." i. "This was really helpful because we worked specifically on my difficulties." j. [Tutoring] "remind me to keep my schedule organized, do assignment ahead of time."
	<i>Drawbacks:</i> k. "Because I'm doing well in school I didn't have need for tutoring." l. "Not quite helpful because some classes I can handle by myself, some classes require specific subject knowledge and the tutor definitely doesn't know everything." m. "It wasn't regular, was after classes, when I was tired already."
(P3) Study Group Sessions	n. "Group study helped me in many different ways: being prepared for tests/exams and class." o. "It was always helpful when I study with a group of people because we can always exchange notes and help each other." p. [Study group sessions helped me] "fully understand the subject material before exam." q. However, not everyone liked to study as a group, and it was difficult to find a time that worked for everyone. r. "It was not helpful because the way that they tried to help me wasn't my way of preparing for exam." s. "It can solve the question for the quiz or others but it is hard to find the time that work for everyone."

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

(P4) Academic Advising	<p>t. “For the first semester as freshman, I didn't know how to choose the classes and which classes I need to take. I just walk in my advisor's office and he explained it to me very well.”</p> <p>u. [The academic advisor made sure that I] “have classes with the best mind professors”</p> <p>v. [The academic advisor was] “always on top of us making sure we were doing good and was really motivational.”</p> <p>w. However, one student wished that the academic advisor was more easily accessible.</p> <p>x. [The academic advising was] “kind of helpful, was complicated to schedule appointment with him.”</p>
(P5) Social Activities	<p>y. “This is a good thing to gather people together and it is nice to explore things and enjoy the day</p> <p>z. Meeting with friends outside the classroom was different and we enjoyed because we were good friends. “</p> <p>aa. “By going to the social activities, I was more involved to the city as well as the school.”</p> <p>bb. [I] “didn't really attend much, but from those that I did it was helpful to adjust yourself to American society.”</p> <p>cc. “It helped me to get into new group and make new friends, so I could have my own group to share and study together.”</p>
(P6) Pathways Orientation	<p>dd. “Pathways orientation is extremely helpful for me. It is a great chance to get to know other international students and teachers. Also receive important information.”</p> <p>ee. [Pathways Orientation helped me] “understand the university campus and explore the campus.”</p> <p>ff. “We met each other, shared our cultures and experiences that it's easier to understand each other and helped each other.”</p>

Table 4.11 Explanations of the Rating in the Survey

In part three of section four (P8), respondents were asked to offer recommendations for the Pathways Program for future improvement. The recommendations were mainly on tutoring and activities. Respondents recommended offering more hours of tutoring every week, and on more subject courses such as literature and psychology, and having more social activities. Some examples of recommendations are listed in table 4.12.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Survey: Recommendations for the Pathways Program	
Recommendations	Examples from the Survey
1. Tutoring	a. "I found on-on-one tutoring really helpful and wished there were more tutoring available more times a week." b. "One-on-one tutoring in some specific courses (e.g. English 210, Literature)." c. "More Pathways tutor for different subjects."
2. Activities	d. "Small group of people from different countries talk about how American culture is different than their own culture." e. "I would love to see more social events to be provided by the program." f. "Invited some guest speakers for motivation." g. "Meet all international faculty at the university."

Table 4.12 Survey: Recommendations for the Pathways Program

5. Summary of the Survey

Section one of the survey summarized the respondent demographics. The respondents represented a diverse group in terms of age, school, and nationality. Section two revealed the top four academic difficulties in the first semester, which were unfamiliar vocabulary, discomfort in speaking, reading comprehension, and writing difficulty. Two additional academic difficulties emerged from section two were lacking content/background knowledge and having professors who were not sensitive to international students' needs. In section three, students identified their top four social difficulties, which were understanding jokes and humor, making American friends, living independently away from family members, and going to social events or gatherings. Despite coming from different countries, many of the Pathways students faced similar academic and social challenges in their first semester at the university. Section four indicated that all services provided from the Pathways Program were rated helpful, with INST courses being the most helpful. Students also recommended offering more hours of tutoring on more subjects, and more social activities in section four.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Table 4.13 categorizes the findings from the survey in relation to the research questions.

Findings from the Survey to Research Questions	
Research Question	Findings from Survey
1. What academic and social challenges do Pathways students face?	<p>Top 4 Academic Challenges: (Table 4.3)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) too much of the vocabulary was unfamiliar - 72% f) not comfortable speaking during pair/group work – 61% i) could not understand the reading material – 61% m) too many grammar errors in writing – 61% <p>Question A2: Lack content/background knowledge</p> <p>Question A3: Some professors are not sensitive to international students</p> <p>Top 4 Social Challenges: (Table 4.8)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> S3) Understanding jokes and humor (M=3.22) S1) making American friends (M=3.11) S9) living independently away from family members (M=3.11) S2) going to social events or gatherings (M=2.94)
1a. Do Pathways students from different countries have different academic and social challenges?	<p>Students from different countries had similar academic challenges during their first semester at the university (tables 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6).</p> <p>There were no significant differences among students from different countries regarding their social difficulties (table 4.9).</p>
2. How does the Pathways Program support its students to overcome their academic and social challenges?	The Pathways Program supported its students by offering helpful services including INST courses, academic advising, tutoring, group study sessions, and orientation (tables 4.10 and 4.11).
2a. How does tutoring support Pathways students in their academic studies?	Tutoring was very helpful because it was personalized to meet individual student's special needs. It also helped students understand reading materials better, improve writing assignments, and keep students on schedule for their assignments (table 4.10 P2 and table 4.11 quotes g,h,i,j).
2b. How does a specially designed curriculum support Pathways students in their academic studies?	INST 105&106 helped Pathways students make new friends when they first arrived, adjust to American culture, and improve their academic English language skills, including writing, reading, speaking, and vocabulary (table 4.10 P1 and table 4.11 quotes a,b,c,d,e,f).

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

2d. How do social events support Pathways students in their social adjustment?	Social events provided opportunities for Pathways students to gather outside the classroom, explore campus and the city, adjust to American culture, and make new friends (table 4.10 P5 and table 4.11 quotes y,z,aa,bb,cc).
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Table 4.13 Findings from the Survey to Research Questions

Focus Group Interviews. The questions for focus group sessions focused on Pathways students' academic and social difficulties in their first year at the university, and the effectiveness of the services the Pathways Program offers. All thirty-five former and current Pathways students received an invitation to participate through email during the third week of January 2016. Students received a second and third invitation during the first and last week of February 2016 respectively. Three Chinese and one Vietnamese student participated in the first focus group on February 1. Three European students participated in the second interview on February 17. Three Saudi Arabian students participated in the third and final interview on February 24.

There were fifteen interview questions. Question one asked for interviewees' background information, including country of origins, time studied in the U.S., reasons for studying in the U.S. and the site university. Question two asked about the academic difficulties they faced during freshmen year. Question three asked about the social difficulties they faced during freshmen year. Question four asked what initial difficulties remained as a current challenge. Question five asked the overall helpfulness of the Pathways Program. Questions six to twelve asked the helpfulness of each service Pathways Program offered, including Pathways orientation, INST 105 & 106, one-on-one tutoring, group study sessions, academic advising, and social activities. Question thirteen asked what additional services the Pathways Program should offer to help students overcome academic and social difficulties. Question fourteen asked for

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

suggestions/advices for incoming new Pathways students. Question fifteen concluded the interview by asking for any additional comments interviewees may have.

After transcribing and coding the interview scripts, five themes emerged from these three focus group interviews: academic adjustment, relationship with professors, social adjustment, Pathways Program services and other support, and recommendations for the Pathways Program.

1. Academic Adjustment

All students participated in the focus group interviews stated that the difficulties with English language was the most salient challenge they faced when they first started college. Writing, reading, speaking, listening, class participation, and communications were all very challenging to them. Some of these difficulties remained as challenges even after their first year. In addition to English language, lack of content knowledge and background knowledge were also hindrances to their academic success in their first year. Some quotes from the interviews are listed in table 4.14.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Focus Group Interview: Academic Challenges	
Challenges	Examples from the Interviews
1. Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. "Writing assignments. It's hard. Like grammar." b. "At first I used baby words for my writing because I didn't know many academic words."
2. Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. "Teachers usually give you a lot of pages to read. And you struggle and then you can't get it done and then when you go to class, you don't know what they are talking about, and you feel that you are falling behind." d. "Also the pace of students reading the books [is too fast]."
3. Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> e. "I'm still struggling with public speaking." f. "I had a really bad experience in one of my classes. There was this guy when I was talking - it was one of those rare occasions, and he laughed at me. I was not talking much before that, but now it's even worse since then."
4. Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g. "Sometimes I'm losing the pace because they are talking so fast. I'm trying to articulate it in my head but when I'm not done, we are already on another topic."
5. Class participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> h. "I never volunteered [to participate in class discussions] and I still don't do it." i. "Just for my education courses because I've been with them for like three years now. We are 8 people and that's the only time I participate. But when I'm out of my education courses, it's really really really rare that I speak."
6. Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> j. "I'm used to be very outgoing in my own language, but in English I'm very shy and don't want to say anything and it's very hard during a conversation - I'm just quiet and stare at other people." k. "Mine [struggle] was articulating and expressing. When you are trying to explain something out loud, you are used to speaking in your own language - your native language. You are trying, you don't use the same words sometimes and you get confused and people don't understand you."
7. Content/background knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> l. "I also found that American history, like when you start reading American literature and poem, you also have to have great knowledge behind that in order to understand what the teacher and the book is talking about." m. "I now have American history, it's harder. We are talking about people I've never heard of." n. "Sometimes they refer to this company and that company. I never heard of it. I know big companies like coca cola. But besides that, it's very difficult to follow. But professors just assume you know."

Table 4.14 Focus Group Interview: Academic Challenges

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

This shows how students' lack of language proficiency and content/background knowledge can impact their ability to comprehend course materials, and impact their ability to keep up with course assignments.

2. Relationship with Professors

During the interviews, many participants indicated that their professors played an important role in their learning during the first year. Some were very sensitive to international students and tried to accommodate their needs. On the other hand, not all professors were well aware of international students' needs, which had caused negative consequences. In order to maintain a good relationship with professors, Pathways students suggested picking the right professors, communicating well with them, and that students should show their efforts to their professors. Table 4.15 listed some highlights from the interviews regarding relationship with professors.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Focus Group Interview: Relationship with Professors	
	Examples from the Interviews
1. Professors Who Are Sensitive to International Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. “I talked to a professor a couple weeks ago, and he said “we are not just professors, we follow the [university] mission, we are here to help”. And I think all professors follow that philosophy.” b. “I have very good relationships with my professor. He also said that when I need to pick classes for next semester, he is gonna pick with me and suggest me professors.” c. “Yesterday I was supposed to do a history lesson. My teacher told me that if I want, I didn’t have to do a history lesson.”
2. Professors Who Are Not Sensitive to International Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> d. “I practiced two questions and showed it to her [the professor] and ask her if there is anything I should add. But she said that I have to do it by myself.” e. “You are in my country so you should speak my language. My teacher actually said that to me.” f. “I always get pointed deducted for grammar or vocabulary in my paper. They know that I’m an international student, so they have to find something in my paper to lower my points.”
3. Importance of Having a Good Relationship with Professors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g. “You have to talk with your professors. You have to be open and honest.” h. “When she [the professor] talked about some American companies that I never heard of, I asked her if I should read from some websites. I started reading New York Times business section because I want to become more familiar with the companies here.” i. “When I took philosophy 100 level, the professor was so tough. Only two people in her class got As, I got B-, and all other students got Cs and Ds, even Fs. Now I have the nice professor and it’s great.” j. “The key thing is to really show effort to your teacher because I feel like they appreciate that. So go to see your teacher during office hours.” k. 11) “Even if you understand everything, still ask them questions because they really appreciate effort. And that may give you a higher grade actually.”

Table 4.15 Focus Group Interview: Relationship with Professors

3. Social Adjustment

During the focus group interviews, many participants stated that they faced tremendous social difficulties when they first started college. It was difficult for them to make friends with domestic students because some American students were not very friendly to international students. Some Pathways students tried to make friends through attending parties, but they were not successful because of cultural differences. Many Pathways students also found it difficult to make friends with other international students because the lack of international students at the site university limited their opportunities to socialize with students who may share similar backgrounds or experiences. Additionally, some Pathways students also mentioned that they missed their families and friends in their home countries. Table 4.16 listed some highlights from the interview regarding the social challenges Pathways students faced during their first semester at the university.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Focus Group Interview: Social Challenges	
Challenges	Examples from the Interviews
1. Difficult to Make Friends	<p>a. “When I try to look for friends, not just any friends, but true friends that you can talk deep stuff, I find it hard. I make friends with foreigners, they are foreigners to me, we have different cultural background, so it’s not easy. They don’t really understand me what I’m talking about. So I’m trying to find people with the same background with me. But it’s hard because there isn’t many Asian people at the university.”</p> <p>b. “I was expecting to find Saudi community here, and they were going to be my friends. But then I started to realize that there are no Saudis here – in the school.”</p> <p>c. “I don’t have social lives.”</p> <p>d. “We have a lot of international people in my country. We are just more welcoming. I appreciate people who are from other countries. But here, they are just so used to it and they don’t appreciate it at all.”</p>
2. Not Used to American Parties	<p>e. “We are just culturally different and I didn’t like a lot of the parties because they were not the way I’m used to.”</p> <p>f. “It’s a drinking party rather than a social party.”</p> <p>g. “They just drink a lot and get drunk. I have to say they have good memories. The next morning they just become friends. I don’t understand that but sometimes they go out every single night. I’m not sure about other countries, but in my country we rarely do that.”</p>
3. Living Away from Family	<p>h. “Yeah they are like 20min from home and they are so homesick. And that makes me really angry. They can go home every weekend!”</p>

Table 4.16 Focus Group Interview: Social Challenges

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

4. Pathways Program Services and Other Support

While participants indicated a great many challenges and barriers in academic and social adjustment during their first semester at the university, they also identified the Pathways Program as a useful resource in their learning. One student mentioned that “it definitely helped me academically”, while another student said “I think for sure [that Pathways program is helpful] because there is a lot of words I didn’t know but through reading the articles, I learned. I realized that in Pathways classes I can talk about everything and I can be involved more in conversations. So I began to like the program a lot. Being through it, I can say it’s a really helpful program. Because without that program, I will probably have more difficulties now with American history and business where you have to be with your groups and with other American students. So it’s much easier now.”

Participants also indicated that the Pathways Program offered a great deal of support for students including support for their writing, exam preparation, registering for classes, and opportunities to meet and socialize outside of the classroom. INST 105&106 courses helped Pathways students in improving their English proficiency and making friends. Tutoring helped them with writing. Study group sessions helped them prepare for exams. Academic advising made it easier to register for classes. Peer support allowed students to help each other. Social activities provided opportunities for Pathways students to hang out outside of the classroom. Some quotes are listed in table 4.17.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Focus Group Interview: Helpful Support from the Pathways Program	
Support	Examples from the Interviews
1. INST 105 & 106	<p>a. “We have INST that helped me a lot. I knew that all students in class are international students. So I wanted to talk a lot in class because if I make some mistakes, it doesn’t really matter because they know I’m also an international student.”</p> <p>b. “In INST my writing went better and better.”</p> <p>c. “Another thing I really liked in the Pathways program, INST and history class, we read articles about things happened in our own countries.”</p> <p>d. “Having class all together with the same schedule the first semester and some class for the second semester, it’s a good start since we don’t know anyone at the school. We made friends and we explored from that.”</p>
2. Tutoring	<p>e. “My biggest one is correcting papers, like grammar. When I go to the writing center, it’s more like the sentence structure mistakes but [the tutor] really pinpoint my grammar mistakes.”</p> <p>f. “It was more than tutoring. When we have history papers, [the tutor] would help us to get it started early, and helped us to brainstorm the ideas of how to start the paper.”</p> <p>g. “It’s hard because it’s very different than my first language. We don’t have words like “a” or “the” in front of words so that’s the hard spot for me. Also grammar, I always want to say everything in one sentence so sometimes I have wrong grammar. So it’s better if I go to the writing center or with [the tutor] so I know how to use punctuation better.”</p>
3. Study Group Sessions	<p>h. “Oh my gosh that [study group sessions] was really helpful. We basically made a study guide when we were there. We go over the knowledge the professor taught in class.”</p> <p>i. “I feel that the study group session mostly forced the students to think about the articles. Not all of us can take all the notes in class so students can share our notes with each other.”</p>
4. Academic Advising	<p>j. “He [academic advisor] can register me a day earlier than other freshmen. And he also made sure that there are at least 2-3 Pathways students in one class. So during my freshmen year, I have pretty much the same schedule with other Pathways students.”</p> <p>k. “I just feel that he [academic advisor] is very responsible. Especially that I have credits transferring. He listens to you, try to meet your needs, and work very hard to figure out a schedule that fits you.”</p>
5. Peer Support	<p>l. “I also like how sometimes when we don’t understand something, others can explain to us in their own words. It’s easier because we avoid using big words. International students know how to paraphrase it in an easy way to make you understand.”</p>

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

	m. "Pathways teacher and staff encouraged me and even Pathways students encouraged me to help me find what's going on and support me."
6. Social Activities	n. "I liked the dinners and lunches." o. "I went to center city and South Street, and it was good I think." p. "We went to the baseball game. It was a great night. It was nice hanging out with people you are familiar with."

Table 4.17 Focus Group Interview: Helpful Support from the Pathways Program

Besides the support Pathways Program offered, participants indicated that they also received support from other departments in the university, such as the Writing Center and the Athletic Department. Some also received support from their teammates and roommates. Some quotes are listed in Table 4.18.

Focus Group Interview: Other Support	
Support	Examples from the Interviews
1. Writing Center	a. "Also I went to the writing center and they helped me a lot." b. "I do go there [writing center] all the time. I just went yesterday."
2. Athletic Department & Teammates	c. "If it's just small assignments, I just send it to my teammates and ask them to check if there are very clear grammar mistake or if the sentences sound fine." d. "For me, it was fine because I have the soccer team. They are always making sure I was OK and I had everything I needed." e. "For student athletes it's easier because we have study hall and there is some people who offer academic support for athletes."
3. Roommates	f. "I think international students should live with a roommate because my roommate helps me with everything." g. "Good thing is that my roommate is also a swimmer so we don't have different schedule. When I have to get up at 5am, he doesn't have a problem because he also has to get up. It's easier that way."

Table 4.18 Focus Group Interview: Other Support

Although most Pathways students in the study mentioned that most tutors from university Writing Center were helpful, some indicated that a few tutors did not know

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

how to work with international students, which made the tutoring experience frustrating. For example, one student said “when I go to the writing center, they always ask me “what are you trying to say here”, and I was like “ugh”.” Another student mentioned that the tutoring was not always enough support, “one of them [tutors] are very nice but some of them are like “you have to change this and this”, but I don’t know what I can change it with. I don’t know what my options are.”

5. Recommendations for the Pathways Program

During the interviews, many participants offered recommendations for the Pathways Program and incoming Pathways students.

For the Pathways program, many participants recommended making tutoring schedule more flexible, tailoring the tutoring for student’s personal needs, offering special sections of the common cores for international students, following up with Pathways students after the first year, offering more opportunities for social gathering, and using social media to stay in touch. These recommendations are listed in table 4.19.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Focus Group Interview: Recommendations for the Pathways Program	
Recommendations	Examples from the Interviews
1. Tutoring	<p>a. “If the tutoring schedule can be more flexible, it would be better.”</p> <p>b. “Tutoring is helpful when you have a problem, but I don’t have free time so I always do my homework on time so when I have tutoring, I don’t have any questions. But I talked to her [the tutor], we agree that when I’m reading history or business or any other classes, I’m gonna write down all the words I don’t know. Then she is gonna tell me if I need to know those words or not. Because if the words are used a lot in academic English, I should know, if not, it’s not a problem.”</p> <p>c. “I don’t really go to tutoring that much. So I actually reached out and talked to [the tutor] about it. I actually don’t need that much tutoring and sometimes when I go to tutoring, I don’t have that much to say. I wouldn’t say it’s a waste of time but it’s not efficient for both of us. So I told him [the tutor] that whenever I need you, I will reach out to you. Whenever the paper is due, I will definitely have a tutoring scheduled a week before that, just to make sure that I have a paper ready and have grammar check and things like that.”</p>
2. Special Sections of the Common Cores	<p>d. “That [having more special sections of the common cores for international students] will make our life so much better. I’m just freaking out by public speaking. I think we can actually practice presentation and public speaking if there are other international students in front of you. We can actually work on it. If there are American students in front of you, you just want to get over with.”</p> <p>e. “I think taking more classes with other international students will be better because the professor know that international students are different than American students.”</p> <p>f. “Maybe religion. Here if you choose Christianity, they are only gonna talk about that. And since 90% of the students are Americans so the professors will assume you already know something. But not all international students are Christian, and they may not know anything about it, it will be hard. So maybe it’s good to have a special section for international students where they can share their religion or study about other religion.”</p>
3. Follow up After the First Year	<p>g. “Maybe in the second year, you can follow up with students who are out of the pathways program. What they are doing, how they are doing.”</p> <p>h. “I wish that the Pathways program could last forever.”</p>
4. Social Gathering	<p>i. “Even just having a conversation like this with all the Pathways students so we can listen to each other and share.”</p> <p>j. “Schedule a meeting with all Pathways students.”</p>
5. Social Media	<p>k. “We have a group chat on Facebook. We talked to each other and help. Or have lunch or something.”</p> <p>l. “We just have each other’s Facebook and sometimes we do group chat.”</p>

Table 4.19 Focus Group Interview: Recommendations for the Pathways Program

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

For incoming Pathways students, many participants recommended making friends with other international students on campus, joining student groups, and starting a mentoring program to pair former and new Pathways students. Some examples are listed in Table 4.20.

Focus Group Interview: Recommendations for Incoming Pathways Students	
Recommendations	Examples from the Interviews
1. Make Friends with Other International Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. "Connect with other international students on campus. Although they are not Pathways but they are international so you still get that bond. b. Talking to people who understand how you feel is more comfortable. That's why I like to be around international students because we all understand each other." c. "Every time I finish a paper, I sent it to a senior student who is also an international student. Do you know Peter? He is from Egypt. I also send it to one of my friends, Brian, in the honor's program."
2. Join Student Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> d. I just want to recommend to all international students to join students groups, like sororities or fraternities because it would be much easier to get friends that way. e. I think if you go out to fraternity or sorority, or go out to the city or a night club, that's completely different.
3. Mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> f. "We would like to be friends with new Pathways students." g. "Former Pathways students can help recruit and mentor. Or like the big sister big brother you know?"

Table 4.20 Focus Group Interview: Recommendations for Incoming Pathways Students

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

6. Summary of the Focus Group Interviews

From the interviews, challenges that emerged were limited English language proficiency including reading, writing, listening, speaking, class participation, and communications, lack of content/background knowledge, and unsuccessful relationship with professors who were not aware of international students' needs. The top three social challenges Pathways students faced were making friends with American and other international students, going to American parties, and living away from family. Participants from all three focus groups shared similar academic and social challenges, which aligns with the survey findings.

All interviewees indicated that the services Pathways Program offered were helpful, including INST courses, tutoring, study group sessions, academic advising, peer support, and social activities. In addition to the support Pathways Program offered, participants indicated that they also received support from other departments in the university, such as the Writing Center and the Athletic Department. Some also received support from their teammates and roommates.

Interviewees offered some recommendations for the Pathways Program, including making tutoring schedules more flexible, tailoring the tutoring for student's personal needs, offering special sections of the common cores for international students, following up with Pathways students after the first year, offering more opportunities for social gathering, and using social media to stay in touch. They also offered some recommendations for incoming Pathways students, including making friends with other international students on campus, joining student groups, and starting a mentoring program to pair former and new Pathways students.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Table 4.21 categorizes the findings from the focus group interviews in relation to the research questions.

Findings from the Focus Group Interviews to Research Questions	
Research Question	Findings from Focus Group Interviews
1. What academic and social challenges do Pathways students face?	<p>Academic Challenges:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Limited English Language Skills (Table 4.14, number 1-6, quotes a-k) Reading, writing, listening, speaking, class participation, communications 2) Lack of content/background knowledge (Table 4.14, number 7, quotes l,m,n) 3) Professors not sensitive to international students (Table 4.15, number 2 quotes d,e,f) <p>Social Challenges: (Table 4.16)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Making friends (quotes a,b,c,d) 2) Going to American parties (quotes e,f,g) 3) Living Away from Family (quote h)
1a. Do Pathways students from different countries have different academic and social challenges?	<p>Students from different countries had similar academic challenges during their first semester at the university (tables 4.14 and 4.15).</p> <p>Students from different countries had similar social challenges during their first semester at the university (table 4.16).</p>
2. How does the Pathways Program support its students to overcome their academic and social challenges?	The Pathways Program supported its students by offering helpful services including INST courses, academic advising, tutoring, group study sessions, and orientation (table 4.17).
2a. How does tutoring support Pathways students in their academic studies?	Tutoring helped Pathways students with writing assignments (table 4.17, number 2 quotes e,f,g).
2b. How does a specially designed curriculum support Pathways students in their academic studies?	INST courses helped Pathways students in improving their English proficiency and making friends (table 4.17 number 1 quotes a,b,c,d).
2d. How do social events support Pathways students in their social adjustment?	Social activities provided opportunities for Pathways students to hang out outside of the classroom (table 4.17 number 6 quotes n,o,p).

Table 4.21 Findings from the Focus Group Interviews to Research Questions

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Tests. In order to assess students' English language proficiency, on September 1 2015 the CaMLA-EPT Form D test along with a TOEFL writing test was administered to the five students in 2015 Pathways cohort. Then on December 1 2015, the CaMLA-EPT Form E test along with another TOEFL writing test was administered to the same students. Both tests were administered during INST 105 class time. Both CaMLA tests and writing tests were scored by the same two ESL instructors from the English Language Institute of the site university for accuracy and validity. Appendix D and E outline the score range and level cut for CaMLA-EPT tests. Appendix F outlines the writing rubric used to score the writing tests.

CaMLA Form D & Form E Test Results				
Student	CaMLA Form D 9/1/2015		CaMLA Form E 12/1/2015	
	Score	Level	Score	Level
1	61	High 4	69	Low 6
2	69	Low 6	69	Low 6
3	58	High 4	63	Low 5
4	58	High 4	74	Mid 6
5	69	Low 6	73	Mid 6

Table 4.22 CaMLA Form D & Form E Test Results

Writing Results		
Student	Writing 1 Level 9/1/2015	Writing 2 Level 12/1/2015
1	3	5
2	3	4
3	4	5
4	4	5
5	4	5

Table 4.23 Writing Results

As shown in table 4.22, four students scored better in the second test and one remained the same. Since the CaMLA-EPT is “a test of general receptive language

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

proficiency, assessing listening comprehension, use of English (vocabulary and grammar), and reading comprehension” (Walter & Hentschel, 2013), those four students improved in their general receptive English in their first semester enrolled in the Pathways Program, especially in listening, vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension.

As shown in table 4.23, all five students scored better in the second writing test, indicating that they all improved their English writing skills, especially in the areas of length/fluency, content, cohesion, vocabulary, grammar usage, spelling, sentence mechanics, and voice audience, during their first semester enrolled in the Pathways Program.

GPA. In order to assess academic achievement, first year GPAs for each Pathways student from cohorts 2012, 2013 and 2014 were collected. Pathways students’ GPAs were obtained through the Software Applications Administrator at the site university. All other non-Pathways international students’ GPAs were obtained through the Assistant Director of Institutional Effectiveness at the site university. A comparative analysis of all international students’ first year GPA was conducted. Results are listed in table 4.24.

Pathways and Non-Pathways International 1st Year GPA Average				
Student Type	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2012-2015 Average
Pathways	2.74	2.72	3.08	2.87
Non-Pathways International	3.00	2.96	2.96	2.98

Table 4.24 Pathways and Non-Pathways International 1st Year GPA Average

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

As shown in table 4.24, non-Pathways international students had slightly higher first year GPA than Pathways students in academic year 2012-2013 and 2013-2014, while Pathways students had slightly higher first year GPA in academic year 2014-2015.

Retention Rate. Pathways cohorts' retention rates were also calculated for the years 2012, 2013 and 2014. Since the Pathways Program is a freshmen-year program, the retention refers to the number of students retained after their freshmen year. Students' enrollment status was obtained through the Software Applications Administrator at the site university. All other non-Pathways international students' enrollment status was obtained through the Assistant Director of Institutional Effectiveness at the site university. Results are listed in table 4.25.

Pathways and Non-Pathways International 1 st Year Retention									
Student Type	2012-2013			2013-2014			2014-2015		
	Start	Return	Retention	Start	Return	Retention	Start	Return	Retention
Pathways	10	9	90.00%	10	6	60.00%	10	10	100%
Non-Pathways	15	14	93.33%	18	13	72.22%	9	8	88.89%

Table 4.25 Pathways and Non-Pathways International 1st Year Retention

As shown in table 4.25, non-Pathways international students had higher retention rate than Pathways students in academic year 2012-2013 and 2013-2014, while Pathways students had higher retention rate in academic year 2014-2015.

Table 4.26 categorizes the findings from the test, GPA, and retention rate in relation to the research questions.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Findings from Test, GPA, and Retention Rate to Research Questions	
Research Question	Findings from Test, GPA, and Retention Rate
2. How does the Pathways Program support its students to overcome their academic and social challenges?	Pathways program provided adequate support to ensure their academic success during their first year, and helped to retain international students at the university (tables 4.22, 4.23 and 4.24).
2b. How does a specially designed curriculum support Pathways students in their academic studies?	Four out five students improved in their general receptive English in their first semester enrolled in the Pathways Program, especially in listening, vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension. All five students scored better in the second writing test, indicating that they all improved their English writing skills, especially in the areas of length/fluency, content, cohesion, vocabulary, grammar usage, spelling, sentence mechanics, and voice audience, during their first semester enrolled in the Pathways Program (tables 4.22 and 4.23).
2c. What impact does the Pathways program have on students' freshmen year academic achievement (GPA)?	Non-Pathways international students had higher GPA than Pathways students in academic year 2012-2013 and 2013-2014, while Pathways students had higher GPA in academic year 2014-2015 (table 4.24).
3. What effect does the Pathways program have on students' first year retention?	Non-Pathways international students had higher retention rate than Pathways students in academic year 2012-2013 and 2013-2014, while Pathways students had higher retention rate in academic year 2014-2015 (table 4.25).

Table 4.26 Findings from Test, GPA, and Retention Rate to Research Questions

Results and Interpretations

Based on the findings of the survey, focus group interviews, tests, GPA, and retention rate, the results of the study are synthesized and discussed below in four themes, including academic adjustment, social adjustment, Pathways Program services, and other support.

Academic Adjustment. Findings from the survey and focus group interviews both indicated that the academic challenges most Pathways students faced during their first semester at the university were limited English language skills including reading, writing, listening, speaking, vocabulary, class participation, and communications, lack of content/background knowledge, and difficulties with professors who may not have been aware of the special academic needs of international students.

The survey results (table 4.3) indicated that the top four academic challenges Pathways students faced during their first semester at the university were unfamiliar vocabulary, discomfort in speaking, reading comprehension, and writing difficulty. An additional challenge identified in the survey was lack of content/background knowledge in specific content areas like American Literature or American History. When facing challenges, Pathways students indicated that they were most likely to ask their professors for help (table 4.7); however, professors who may not be aware of the unique needs of international students might not be able to offer appropriate levels of support.

Academic challenges emerging from the survey were consistent with participants' responses from the focus group. During the focus group, participants shared that they faced academic challenges such as limited English language skills including reading, writing, listening, speaking, vocabulary, communication, and class participation, and lack

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

of content/background knowledge in certain areas. In addition, participants also expressed the important role that professors played in Pathways students' first year studies (table 4.15). Therefore, maintaining a good relationship with professors was a key to academic success. However, some professors were not sensitive to international students' needs.

Findings from both the survey and focus group interviews showed that students from different countries experienced similar academic difficulties during their first semester at the university (tables 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.14 and 4.15).

Table 4.27 summarizes Pathways students' academic challenges from the findings from the survey and focus group interviews.

Summary: Academic Adjustment		
Challenges	Findings from the Survey	Findings from the Focus Group Interviews
Limited English Language Skills	Table 4.3 a,f,i,m	Table 4.14 Number 1-6 Quotes a-k
Lack Content/Background knowledge	Answers to Question A2	Table 4.14 Number 7 Quotes l,m,n
Relationship with Professors	Answers to Question A3 & Table 4.7	Table 4.15 Number 2 Quotes d,e,f

Table 4.27 Summary: Academic Adjustment

It was anticipated that mastering the English language would be a great challenge for Pathways students in their first semester at the university, and the results from the survey and focus group interviews helped support this hypothesis. Although participating Pathways students had studied English for many years in their home countries and reached varying levels of proficiency, they still had tremendous difficulty reaching the English proficiency level required by U.S. undergraduate studies. In addition, many Pathways students indicated that there was a period of adjustment when transitioning into

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

full-time study in a second language. They struggled with grammar and academic vocabulary in writing, too much reading, public speaking, fast-paced lectures, participating in class discussions, and even simply expressing themselves. These results are consistent with the literature on international students' academic challenges. Research has shown that limited English language proficiency is considered one of the most challenging issue international students have in U.S universities and colleges (Bauer & Picciotto, 2013; Fayley, 2007; Kinnucan, 2012; Lee & Carrasquillo, 2006; Zhang & Mi, 2010).

In addition to limited English language proficiency, many Pathways students in the study reported lacking content/background knowledge, especially in American history, literature, and business courses. The majority of the Pathways students had no background knowledge of American history or literature. Thus when they were taking those classes, they had a difficult time understanding the content. In business courses, professors always gave examples of American companies or case studies which were unfamiliar to international students. These results align with He and Shi's (2012) findings, which argue that subject content is considered one of the most difficult challenges for international students at college level studies and should be taken into consideration in English writing courses.

Although many Pathways students experienced various difficulties in relation to English language proficiency and course content knowledge, a majority of the Pathways students who participated in this study preferred going to their professors for help when they had academic difficulties. Thus in order to achieve academic success, many Pathways students in the study indicated that it was important to keep a good relationship

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

with their professors. Developing a good relationship with a professor requires choosing the right professors, communicating well with her, and showing efforts to the professor. However, some students experienced difficulties with their professors because the professors may not be aware of international students' special needs. Roy (2013) argues that in order for American professors to understand cultural differences and to avoid miscommunication and confusion, professors must incorporate "emotional intelligence, the respectful mind, and the creating mind" into their pedagogical teaching methods (p. 11). By incorporating emotional intelligence, professors will be able to "establish a learning environment which nurtures and fosters affective and concomitant academic success" (Liff, 2003, p. 29). Furthermore, incorporating a respectful mind will enable professors to "capitalize on teachable moments and broaden the paradigms of students and faculty members alike" (Roy, 2013, p. 15). When engaging in the use of "respectful mind" and "creating mind", professors will be able to create novel ideas to ensure the academic success of their international students (Roy, 2013).

Social Adjustment. Findings of the survey and focus group interviews both indicated that the social challenges most Pathways students faced during their first semester at the university were adapting to American culture, making friends with American and other international students, attending social events, and living independently away from families.

According to the results from the survey and the focus group interviews, the top four social challenges Pathways students faced during their first semester at the university

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

were understanding jokes and humor, making American friends, living independently away from family members, and going to social events or gatherings (table 4.8).

Social challenges emerging from the survey were consistent with participants' responses from the focus group interviews. During the focus group interviews, many participants shared that they faced social challenges such as making friends with both domestic and international students, adapting to American cultures (such as going to parties), and living away from their families during their first semester at the university (table 4.16). It was difficult for them to make friends with domestic students because they felt that some American students were not very friendly to international students. Some Pathways students tried to make friends through attending parties, but they were not successful because of cultural differences in socializing. Many Pathways students also found it difficult to make friends with other international students because the lack of international students limited their opportunities to socialize with students who may share similar backgrounds or experiences.

Findings from both the survey and focus group interviews also showed that students from different countries experienced similar social difficulties during their first semester at the university (tables 4.9 and 4.16).

Table 4.28 summarizes Pathways students' social challenges from the findings from the survey and focus group interviews.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Summary: Social Adjustment		
Challenges	Findings from the Survey	Findings from the Focus Group Interviews
Difficult to Make Friends	Table 4.8 S1	Table 4.16 Number 1 Quotes a,b,c,d
Cultural Difference (not use to American parties, do not understand jokes and humor, cannot adapt to American etiquette)	Table 4.8 S2, S3, S14	Table 4.16 Number 2 Quotes e,f,g
Living Independently Away from Family Members	Table 4.8 S9	Table 4.16 Number 3 Quote h

Table 4.28 Summary: Social Adjustment

Pathways students experienced many social challenges, and this included their frustration in adapting to American culture and making friends with American students because many Pathways students could not express themselves well enough, could not understand American jokes and humor, and were not used to the way American students made friends. These results are consistent with the literature on international students' difficulties in social adjustment. Research has shown that a lack of English language proficiency is a significant predictor of acculturative distress (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Constantine, et al. (2005) and Gebhard (2012) also indicated that international students find it difficult to make friends and establish a social network with their American peers when they have limited English proficiency and lack experience and familiarity with American interactive behaviors. Moreover, Lacina (2002) argued that many international students are academic-English-ready but not social-English ready. Therefore, Pathways students' unfamiliarity with idioms and slang can interfere with communication with their American peers.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Additionally, Pathways students perceived some American students as unfriendly. This perception caused Pathways students to avoid establishing friendship with American students on campus or in their classes. Although Pathways students would like to make friends with other international students on campus, it was not easy because the lack of international students limited their opportunities to socialize with students who may share similar backgrounds or experiences, which may have increased a sense of loneliness or isolation. Similarly, these feelings were magnified because Pathways students, and all international students, tend to be away from family and friends, making them feel lonely (Tompson & Tompson, 1996). This compounded their struggles to adapt and fit into the social fabric of the college campus.

Pathways Program Services. Findings of the survey and focus group interviews both indicated the Pathways Program was overall effective in meeting students' needs for academic success and social adjustment.

According to the survey, Pathways students considered all supporting services helpful. Respondents identified the utility of all services, with INST classes being the most helpful, followed by academic advising, weekly one-on-one tutoring, group study sessions, social activities, and orientation (table 4.10). In addition, Pathways students indicated that INST courses also helped them make new friends when they first arrived, adjust to American culture, and improve their academic English language skills. Tutoring was personalized to meet individual student's needs, and helped with understanding reading materials and revising writing assignments. Group study sessions were helpful in preparing for exams and providing opportunities for students to work together for peer

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

support. Academic advising was helpful in choosing courses, selecting professors, and motivating students. Social activities provided opportunities for students to gather outside the classroom, explore campus and the city, adjust to American culture, and make new friends. Orientation provided the opportunities for students to get to know each other and share their cultures, and useful information on how to navigate campus.

The findings from the survey regarding Pathways program services were consistent with the findings from the focus group interviews. During the focus group interviews, all interviewees mentioned that they think the Pathways program was overall very helpful. Participants indicated that INST courses helped Pathways students in improving their English proficiency and making friends. Tutoring helped them with writing. Study group sessions helped them prepare for exams. Academic advising made it easier to register for classes. Peer support allowed students to help each other. Social activities provided opportunities for Pathways students to hang out outside of the classroom (table 4.17).

Table 4.29 summarizes the helpfulness of Pathways program services from the findings from the survey and focus group interviews.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Summary: Helpfulness of Pathways Program Services		
Services	Findings from the Survey	Findings from the Focus Group Interviews
INST 105 & 106	Table 4.10 & Table 4.11 Quotes a-f	Table 4.17 Number 1 Quotes a-d
Tutoring	Table 4.10 & Table 4.11 Quotes g-j	Table 4.17 Number 2 Quotes e-g
Study Group Sessions	Table 4.10 & Table 4.11 Quotes n-s	Table 4.17 Number 3 Quotes h,i
Academic Advising	Table 4.10 & Table 4.11 Quotes t-x	Table 4.17 Number 4 Quotes j,k
Social Activities	Table 4.10 & Table 4.11 Quotes y-cc	Table 4.17 Number 6 Quotes n-p
Orientation	Table 4.10 & Table 4.11 Quotes dd-ff	

Table 4.29 Summary: Helpfulness of Pathways Program Services

INST 105 & 106

While Pathways students found academic resources to be useful, they also indicated that INST 105&106, two course that are offered, were the most useful service the program offers (table 4.10). They indicated that INST helped them make new friends, adjust to American culture, and most importantly, improve their academic English language skills (tables 4.11 and 4.17).

All Pathways students took INST 105&106 courses together as their mandatory electives during their first semester at the university. In the survey and focus group interviews, participants indicated that INST courses were a great way for them to get to know each other and make friends when they were all new to the university and did not have any friends. It also provided opportunities for the Pathways students to explore American culture together, share their experience, and practice their English in an environment where they felt secure and comfortable, as their peers were also international students who were at similar English proficiency level. Additionally, the

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

curriculum of INST courses was designed specifically for international students to improve their English academic reading, writing, presentation and critical thinking skills. According to the results from the CaMLA post-test (table 4.22), all Pathways students except one scored higher than their initial test scores. In addition, the students also demonstrated improved writing skills after being assessed in their writing at the end of the semester. All students improved at least one level after taking the INST courses (table 4.23). Although these five Pathways students in 2015 cohort may have received some additional help in learning English from their professors, the Pathways tutor or their peers, it was not necessarily as focused on academic language development or did not provide the kind of focused feedback that the INST coursework provided for students' academic English development. Their main resource of learning and improving English language skills was still through taking INST courses. Thus, the test results suggested that INST courses were helpful in improving Pathways students' overall English language proficiency.

In addition to providing support for English language development, the INST curriculum also supported development of students' content specific knowledge, which was found to be a barrier for international students to succeed in American undergraduate courses. The INST curriculum was closely tied to the World History course to help students understand the content knowledge they may lack from their own educational background. As shown in He and Shi's (2012) and Andrade's (2007) studies, international students can improve their English language skills as well as understand the subject content when subject content is taken into consideration in English language courses. Thus, the INST courses functioned to also provide students with integral and

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

important background knowledge and domain specific content to better understand course work they might not be as familiar with.

Tutoring

In addition to course work, many of the participants also cited that one-on-one tutoring was helpful because it met individual student's special needs. It also helped students understand reading materials better, improve their writing assignments, and keep them on schedule for their assignments. As Ragavan (2014) points out in his study, "international students are a diverse group carrying with them a variety of cultural and social backgrounds; thus, learning patterns and academic expectations differ significantly from one international student to another" (p. 1). Thonus (2014) also argues that multilingual international students are not a uniform group. Each individual has her own needs. Thus, "the point of tutoring is to individualize instruction. Tutors must learn what multilingual writers need and tailor their practices to those learners' needs" (p. 205), which is exactly what Pathways tutors did for their students. The Pathways tutoring was very individualized. One student mentioned in the interview that her most salient challenge was grammar, and the tutor "really pinpoint my grammar mistakes". Another student did not have any difficulties with his assignments but wanted to increase his vocabulary in specific content areas. Thus the tutor and he "agree that when I'm reading history or business or any other classes, I'm gonna write down all the words I don't know. Then she is gonna tell me if I need to know those words or not. Because if the words are used a lot in academic English, I should know, if not, it's not a problem". This kind of individualized tutoring helped to meet students' special needs.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Although many students reported valuing tutoring sessions, some others reported that tutoring was not always necessary. Two students during the focus group interviews suggested that tutoring was not as useful once they achieved some level of success. This suggests that Pathways supports are not always needed for all the students, and that there are varying levels of student supports to meet unique student needs. In addition, this also suggests that international students at the site university can and do attain some levels of success and efficacy. Two other students complained that the tutoring schedule was not flexible, and that they struggled to find the time to meet with tutors during the allotted time.

Study Group Sessions

While tutoring and course work provided some specific academic supports to develop English language proficiency and content knowledge, students also indicated that group study sessions were a useful support to help prepare for exams. It provided opportunities for them to work together, learn from each other, and receive support from each other. Peer support is considered critical for international students. DePhillips (2014) points out that international students “benefit greatly from engaging academically and socially with peers from other countries and cultures” (p. 43). Yamada, Klugar, Ivanova, and Oborna (2014) also argue that “psychological distress and low peer social support synergistically may increase a probability for poor academic self-perception among international students”, and “promoting peer social relationships may interrupt the vicious cycle of psychological distress and poor academic performance” (p. 6). One student in the survey indicated that it was always helpful when she studied with a group

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

of people because they could always exchange notes and help each other. Another student in the focus group interview mentioned that “study group sessions are really helpful because we go over the knowledge the professor taught in class, and because not all of us can take all the notes in class so we can share our notes with each other”. Thus, study group sessions promoted peer support and collaboration among Pathways students.

Although many students recognized the benefits of study group sessions, other students did not like the idea of studying as a group. One student preferred studying alone to prepare for exams. “It was not helpful because the way that they tried to help me wasn't my way of preparing for exam”, she said in the interview. Another student mentioned that “it is hard to find the time that work for everyone.”

Academic Advising

Another useful resource for international students in the Pathways Program was the academic advisor. Research has shown that academic advisors play an important role in international students' academic and social success at U.S. universities. Rice, Choi, Zhang, Villegas, Ye, Anderson, and Bigler (2009) argue that “advisors who demonstrate, through words and deeds, their sensitivity to advisees' culturally linked adjustment and stress issues could yield stronger rapport in the advising alliance”, and “it seems important to be mindful of the advising relationship as a form of social support with significant implications for international students” (p. 389).

The findings of this study aligns with the literature. The results from the survey and focus group interviews indicated that the academic advisor helped students choose courses, select professors, and serves as a motivator for students when they face

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

difficulties or obstacles. In the survey, one student mentioned that “for the first semester as freshman, I didn't know how to choose the classes and which classes I need to take. I just walk in my advisor's office and he explained it to me very well”. Another student said that the Pathways academic advisor was “always on top of us making sure we were doing good and was really motivational”.

Orientation

In addition to academic supports, students also indicated that their initial introduction to the Pathways Program was helpful for developing relationships and sharing cultural backgrounds. One student mentioned in the survey “Pathways orientation is extremely helpful for me. It is a great chance to get to know other international students and teachers. Also receive important information”. Another student said that the Pathways orientation helped him “understand the university campus and explore the campus”.

However, among the six services Pathways program offered, it was rated the least helpful (Table 4.9) as several students did not remember attending it at all. The lower rating for the orientation as a helpful service may be because this is only a once a semester occurrence, and students will not attend after their initial orientation. In contrast, many of the other services offered by the Pathways Program are continuous and ongoing throughout their first year at the university. In addition, the Pathways orientation was only offered during Pathways students' first week of classes. This is a time when Pathways students are still unfamiliar with the campus, and they may experience some uncertainties with adapting to the campus culture. Research has shown that international

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

students benefit most from extended orientation, which is offered throughout the first week or even the first semester (Campbell, 2012; Polito, 2013). Thus, an extended orientation should be considered in near future for the Pathways students.

Social activities

While there are many services to support academic success and orientation to the campus, students also need social activities to expand their social network and adjust to American culture. As the survey results and focus group responses suggest, the social activities Pathways Program offered were very helpful in expanding students' social networking and adjusting to American culture. Wilson (2011) argued that the key factors that affect social adjustment are gender, age, time in the U.S., cultural distance, language ability, and having a peer mentor or friendship family. Many Pathways students were born and raised in countries outside of the U.S., and came to the U.S. for higher education when they were 18 years or older. Many of them are from countries that have very different cultures and values than the U.S. In addition, they faced the linguistic barrier that makes communicating with native English speakers for academic and social purposes much more challenging. For most Pathways students, it is their first time living on their own, let alone in another country. Thus, older ages, minimal time in the U.S., cultural distance, limited language ability, and the absence of mentors and friends also contribute to social challenges that international students face.

The social activities Pathways Program offered, such as field trips, sports games and social events, provided opportunities for them to gather outside the classroom, explore campus and the city, adjust to American culture, and make new friends. In the

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

study, one student considered the social activity “a good thing to gather people together”, and “it is nice to explore things and enjoy the day”. Another student mentioned that “by going to the social activities, I was more involved to the city as well as the school”. An additional comment about the social activities was that “it helped me to get into new group and make new friends, so I could have my own group to share and study together”.

Pathways Program Impact on GPA and Retention

While Pathways students had a vast array of academic and social supports during their first year at the university, non-Pathways international students had higher GPAs than Pathways students in their first year during academic year 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. Beyond their GPA, Pathways students also entered with a lower TOEFL or IELTS score than non-Pathways international students. This may be one of the reasons why their first year GPA was not as high. Nevertheless, for the 2014-2015 academic year, the Pathways students had a higher GPA than non-Pathways international students. This suggests that the Pathways Program not only helped these students overcome their English language challenges, but also provided adequate support to ensure their academic success during their first year.

In addition to GPAs, the retention rate of the Pathways students is slightly lower than non-Pathways international students at the university in academic year 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. However, although five students left the program in 2012 and 2013, none of them complained about the program or were unsatisfied with the program. They left due to various personal reasons. One student was not able to renew his financial guarantee from his government; one lost his financial support because his dad’s company

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

went bankrupt; two moved to another city where they had relatives; one transferred to another university because she wanted to study pre-med, which was not offered at the site university. In academic year 2014-2015, the Pathways program had 100% students retained, which was higher than non-Pathways international students at the university. However, differences between the retention rate of Pathways students and non-Pathways international students were not statistically significant. As a result, there is no empirical support for conclusions. Nevertheless, the data suggest that as a relatively new program, the Pathways has shown increased improvement in student retention over the course of its existence.

Other Support. Participants from the study indicated that in addition to the support Pathways Program offered, they also received support from their teammates, roommates, and other departments in the university, such as the Writing Center and the Athletic Department. As Zimmerman (2012) argued, support for international students should not be merely from the international students' office and their professors, but it should be a joint effort from all departments and offices within the university. Their needs should be addressed through collaboration among international students, their American peers, professors, the library, and the Writing Center. The academic, social and other encouragement international students receive would help strengthen their academic content knowledge and language development, as well as social adjustment.

Although some Pathways students found these supports useful, they were not accessible to all international students. Not all international students were members of a sport team and did not have access to teammates. Furthermore, some participants complained that the Writing Center tutors did not know how to address the unique needs

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

of international students writing, which ultimately made the tutoring experience frustrating, discouraging international students from returning.

Summary

In order to help determine whether the Pathways Program is effective in helping its students with academic and social adjustment, it is essential for the researcher to fully understand the academic and social difficulties Pathways students faced during their first semester at the university. According to the quantitative and qualitative results analyzed in this chapter, Pathways students, despite their different cultural backgrounds, faced similar academic and social challenges during their first semester at the university. The academic challenges were limited English language skills including reading, writing, listening, speaking, class participation, communications, and lack of content/background knowledge in specific academic fields. Some also experienced difficulties with professors who may not have experience with teaching international students with developing English proficiency and/or limited content/background knowledge. Students also faced social challenges including adapting to American culture, making friends with American and other international students, attending social events, and living independently away from families. These results aligned with the literature on international students' challenges at U.S. universities and colleges.

The purpose of developing the Pathways program was to attract more international students to come to the university for this innovative "bridge program" that offers full-admissions to undergraduate programs with scholarship money, as well as providing academic and social supports for international students who need additional English language training to adjust and learn in a structured environment that is

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

specifically tailored to their unique needs during their first year at the university. Based on the results of this study, the Pathways Program has met its purposes. All participants in the study considered the Pathways Program was overall effective in meeting their needs for academic success and social adjustment. The services the Pathways Program offered, including INST courses, tutoring, study group sessions, academic advising, orientation, and social activities, were all considered helpful. The results suggested that the Pathways Program provided adequate support to ensure students' academic and social success during their first year, and helped retain international students at the university after the first year. This innovative "bridge program" not only maximized campus resources for international students, but also saved a considerable amount of time and money for international students who need additional English language training studying in U.S. universities and colleges. Thus, other institutions considering an increase of their international student enrolment may want to consider adopting some of the more successful supports utilized by the Pathways Program.

While the Pathways Program offers its students a host of supports during their first year, it is important for universities and colleges with a growing international student population to recognize that services and supports should not come from one office or program. That is, supporting international students needs to be a coordinated effort from across university offices and disciplines. To shift the responsibility to one office or department limits international students' experience and opportunity to interact with native English speakers and places an undue burden on that office or department, depleting resources like time, faculty and staff.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendation

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived academic and social barriers, as well as the opportunities international undergraduate students experience while participating in the Pathways Program. The results of this research helped to determine the effectiveness of the Pathways Program in its efforts to assist international students who need additional English language training to bolster their academic and social adjustment. It also clarified which support services should be developed and emphasized in similar full-admission undergraduate programs for international students.

The Pathways Program at the site university is a unique undergraduate program for international students. It not only offers full admissions to eligible students with scholarship money, but also provides free comprehensive academic and social support throughout students' first year at the university. These supports include an orientation, specially designed courses (INST 105&106), one-on-one tutoring, study group sessions, academic advising, and social activities.

In order to gather data and analyze the Pathways Program's effectiveness, a case study approach was utilized with both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Pathways students completed a survey that examined their academic and social challenges during their first year at the university, and asked for recommendations for future improvement for the Pathways Program. In addition to surveys, Pathways students also participated in three focus group interviews conducted to gain more insights on their difficulties in academic and social adjustment, as well as their suggestions on improving the program. Moreover, data were collected on students' English proficiency using two standardized

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

assessments. Institutional data were also analyzed to evaluate how Pathways students compared with other international undergraduate on campus. First year GPAs for each Pathways student from cohorts 2012, 2013 and 2014 were collected to assess their academic achievement. Pathways cohorts' retention rates were also calculated for the years 2012, 2013 and 2014.

Through synthesizing the results from the quantitative and qualitative analysis, this chapter will summarize the academic and social barriers of international undergraduate students participating in the Pathways Program, and offer recommendations on how to further improve the services the Pathways Program and the institution offer to better accommodate international students' academic and social needs.

Conclusions

The results of this study provided a vast amount of information about the academic and social challenges Pathways students faced during their first year at the university, as well as the effectiveness of Pathways Program's services. Each research question is answered below:

Research Question 1: What academic and social challenges do Pathways students face?

Findings from the survey and focus group interviews both indicated that the academic challenges most Pathways students faced during their first semester at the university were limited English language skills including reading, writing, listening, speaking, vocabulary, class participation, and communications, lack of content/background knowledge, and difficulties with professors who may not have been aware of the special academic needs of international students.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Findings of the survey and focus group interviews both indicated that the social challenges most Pathways students faced during their first semester at the university were adapting to American culture, making friends with American and other international students, attending social events, and living independently away from families.

Research Question 1a. Do Pathways students from different countries have different academic and social challenges during their first semester at the university?

Although the Pathways Program has students from various backgrounds and cultures, these international students share the common struggle of similar academic and social difficulties of adapting to American undergraduate life. Results from both the survey and focus group interviews showed that students from different countries experienced similar academic and social difficulties during their first semester at the university.

Research Question 2: How does the Pathways Program support its students to overcome their academic and social challenges?

Research Question 2a: How does tutoring support Pathways students in their academic studies?

Research Question 2b. How does a specially designed curriculum support Pathways students in their academic studies?

Research Question 2d: How do social events support Pathways students in their social adjustment?

Findings of the survey and focus group interviews both indicated the Pathways Program was overall effective in meeting students' needs for academic success and social

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

adjustment. All services the Pathways Program offered were helpful. Participants rated INST 105&106 as the most useful service the program offers. They indicated that INST helped them make new friends, adjust to American culture, and most importantly, improve their academic English language skills. In addition to course work, many of the participants also cited that one-on-one tutoring was helpful because it met individual student's special needs. It also helped students understand reading materials better, improve their writing assignments, and keep them on schedule for their assignments. While tutoring and course work provided some specific academic supports to develop English language proficiency and content knowledge, participants also indicated that group study sessions were a useful support to help prepare for exams. It provided opportunities for them to work together, learn from each other, and receive support from each other. Another useful resource for Pathways students was the academic advisor. Participants indicated that the academic advisor helped students choose courses, select professors, and serves as a motivator for students when they face difficulties or obstacles. In addition to academic supports, students also indicated that the orientation offered initial introduction to the Pathways Program was helpful for developing relationships and sharing cultural backgrounds.

While there are many services to support academic success and orientation to the campus, students also need social activities to expand their social network and adjust to American culture. As the survey results and focus group responses suggest, the social activities Pathways Program offered were very helpful in expanding students' social networking and adjusting to American culture. The social activities Pathways Program offered, such as field trips, sports games and social events, provided opportunities for

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

them to gather outside the classroom, explore campus and the city, adjust to American culture, and make new friends.

Research Question 2c. What impact does the Pathways program have on students' freshmen year academic achievement (GPA)?

While Pathways students had a vast array of academic and social supports during their first year at the university, non-Pathways international students had higher GPAs than Pathways students in their first year during academic year 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. Beyond their GPA, Pathways students also entered with a lower TOEFL or IELTS score than non-Pathways international students. This may be one of the reasons why their first year GPA was not as high. Nevertheless, for the 2014-2015 academic year, the Pathways students had a higher GPA than non-Pathways international students at the end of the academic year. This suggests that the Pathways Program not only helped these students overcome their English language challenges, but also provided adequate support to ensure their academic success during their first year.

Research Question 3: What effect does the Pathways program have on students' first year retention?

The retention rate of the Pathways students is slightly lower than non-Pathways international students at the university in academic year 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. However, although five students left the program in 2012 and 2013, none of them complained about the program or were unsatisfied with the program. They left due to various personal reasons. One student was not able to renew his financial guarantee from his government; one lost his financial support because his dad's company went bankrupt; two moved to another city where they had relatives; one transferred to another university

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

because she wanted to study pre-med, which was not offered at the site university. In academic year 2014-2015, the Pathways program had 100% students retained, which was higher than non-Pathways international students at the university. However, differences between the retention rate of Pathways students and non-Pathways international students were not statistically significant. As a result, there is no empirical support for conclusions. Nevertheless, the data suggest that as a relatively new program, the Pathways has shown increased improvement in student retention over the course of its existence.

Appendix G summarizes how qualitative and quantitative results answer each research question.

Recommendations

The results of this study suggested that although the Pathways Program was overall effective in meeting students' needs for academic success and social adjustment, additional services can be provided to further address international students' needs at the university. Additional steps can also be taken by the University to create a climate in which faculty, staff, and students value the presence of international students, recognize their academic and social adjustment challenges, and are willing to accommodate and assist them to improve and maximize their four-year experience on campus.

Recommendations for the Pathways Program

Courses & Curriculum

1. Although the curriculum of INST 105&106 is designed to focus on both academic English reading and writing skills, the current curriculum emphasizes more

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

writing process instruction than reading process. However, according to the results of the study, many Pathways students have difficulties in reading and vocabulary. Thus, additional reading and vocabulary practice could be included in the INST curriculum. For example, more academic readings could be added to the curriculum, a main/supporting idea sheet could be filled out for each reading, a vocabulary notebook could be kept to record new vocabulary words from each reading, and a vocabulary quiz could be given at the end of each unit. Moreover, leisure reading of newspapers and novels could be encouraged to increase students' interest in independent reading. Each student could keep a reading log, submit it at the end of each unit, and share what he/she has read with other Pathways students in class.

2. The other academic challenge many Pathways students face is speaking during pair/group work. Thus during INST 105 & 106 classes, more pair and group work could be encouraged, such as discussing reading questions, sharing experience of readings, peer reviewing for writing assignments, and doing group presentations.
3. The study revealed that the most two challenging social difficulties Pathways students face were understanding American jokes and humor and not being familiar with American college social experiences such as parties. Thus, INST 105 & 106 could incorporate a cultural component to its curriculum to introduce American culture to Pathways students. Thirty minutes every week during INST classes could be designated to introduce a special cultural topic to the students, such as different types of American jokes (slapstick, insult comedy and

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

impersonations, satire, and stand-up comedy) and different ways of making friends with Americans.

4. The Pathways Program could develop and offer more special sections of the common core courses to not only the Pathways students but all international students at the university. The results of the study indicate that international students face academic challenges such as limited English language proficiency and lack of content knowledge. Thus, it is challenging for them to take certain common core courses such as public speaking, religion, psychology and sociology with their American peers. Although the Pathways Program currently offers special sections of three common core courses such as American History, World History and College Writing 1, it is not enough to meet Pathways students' needs. Some regularly admitted non-Pathways international students also face the same challenges, which was reported by their common core course professors. Therefore, special sections of additional common core courses, such as psychology, sociology, religion and public speaking, need to be created to offer to all international students to accommodate their needs. The Pathways Program could collaborate with multiple departments to design the curriculum and hire/train instructors who are both content and ESL specialized. These specially designed courses will help support the university's growing international student population.

Social Activities

1. The study showed that one of the social challenges Pathways students face is making friends. It is difficult to make friends with American students because of

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

the cultural difference, and it is difficult to make friends with other international students because the university does not have a large international population.

Thus, the Pathways Program could host more cultural events that bring domestic and international students together. For example, several Pathways students could be paired with a domestic student's family over American traditional holidays to experience the authentic American culture such as Thanksgiving. The Pathways Program could also collaborate with the Multicultural International Center (MIC) to host campus-wide celebrations for traditional holidays of Pathways students' own culture, and invite other international students and domestic students to join the celebrations. Through these kinds of social events, Pathways students could be introduced to other American and international students, thus friendships can be established.

2. Results suggested that social interactions and developing friendships were a struggle for Pathways students. A paired mentorship may help improve students' efforts to make connections and social resources on campus. Each new Pathways student could be paired with one or several former Pathways students, preferable from the same country. This way, new students could meet other students from the same cultural and linguistic background, who have been through the same program. They could have mentors' guidance on academic and social issues during their first year. Their mentors could also help the new students navigate their available supports. Once firm friendship and mentorship is built, it may last throughout their four years of studies at the university, which could help reduce their feeling of loneliness living away from their families and friends.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

3. Another way of helping Pathways students to get connected with other international and domestic students on campus is to use social media. Social media is a practical means for international students to develop and expand their social networks. Furthermore social networks are nearly ubiquitous and many students may come with familiarity with the use of social networks. Thus, A Pathways Program fan page could be created on Facebook and Instagram. It is a place to share experience and concerns, and to promote interactions among current students. Videos and pictures of activities in the program could be posted on social media as well, which can serve as a marketing tool to recruit potential Pathways students.

Other Support

1. In this study, although Pathways orientation is considered overall helpful in providing opportunities for Pathways students to get to know each other and share their cultures, it was rated the least helpful among the six services Pathways Program offered, as several students did not remember attending it at all. The reason was probably that the Pathways orientation was only a one-time orientation offered during Pathways students' first week of classes. At that time, they were still very unfamiliar with everything on campus and meanwhile having many uncertainties going through their minds. Therefore, it was easy to forget what was offered at the Pathways orientation without any follow-up meetings or gatherings. Research has shown that international students benefit most from extended orientation, which is offered throughout the first week or even the first semester (Campbell, 2012; Polito, 2013). Thus, the Pathways Program could

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

extend the one-day orientation to a full semester orientation. Meetings could be scheduled every other week for the Pathways students, along with their academic advisor, program Director, and tutors. One or more selected topics could be addressed at each meeting. The topics could cover policies and procedures of the Pathways program; university policies and American higher education; campus resources, time management, computer and study skills; and American and regional culture and appreciation for diversity (Andrade, 2006). Since some non-Pathways international students face similar challenges, an orientation could be useful for them as well. With all the essential information provided at the extended orientation, Pathways students and other non-Pathways international students could be better prepared for their first year at the semester.

2. In the study, two student athletes in the Pathways Program (one was a soccer player and the other was a swimmer) experienced fewer academic adjustment issues than non-student athletes in the program. One reason is that student athletes, both domestic and international, get help from their teammates and coaches. The other important reasons is that the athletic department has mandatory study halls every night to keep athletes on track of their studies and assignments. Since the majority of Pathways students live on campus (the university requires all first and second year students to live on campus), the Pathways Program could also have mandatory study halls for students two or three nights a week under a tutor's supervision. Mandatory study halls could keep Pathways students on top of their assignments and get prompt help from the tutor. Group study sessions could also be held during study halls.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

3. It is crucial to follow up with Pathways students during their second, third, and fourth year at the university, as requested by current and former Pathways students. Pathways students' academic performance could be tracked once they are out of the Pathways program (after their freshmen year). Through tracking their academic performance and communicating with the students, their academic advisors and professors, issues could be timely identified and addressed, which helps to provide additional support and retain students.

Recommendations for the Institution

1. The study revealed that Pathways students need the program to offer tutoring on more subjects with a more flexible schedule. However, the Pathways Program is limited on budget and staff. Thus, the university Academic & Learning Support Services, with much more staff and a more flexible schedule, could share the tutoring load with the Pathways program. However, they usually do not have tutors who are specialized in working with international students. Thus, the university Academic & Learning Support Services could provide ESL training for its subject tutors and writing center tutors on best practices in working with international students. It could be a series of workshop offered throughout a semester or an intensive week during summer. They could also open the tutoring positions to international students, who understand their own needs and may serve them better. Financial support for this initiative could be requested from the International Institute.
2. University professors need to be aware of international students' special academic needs. For example, they should have some tolerance on minor vocabulary and

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

grammatical errors in their writing assignments (as long as they do not impede meaning). In addition, professors should avoid using too many idioms/slang/American jokes in their lectures that could be difficult for international students to understand, and encourage international students to share history, literature, and business cases from their countries. This way, international students could be encouraged to participate in class discussion and feel the sense of being appreciated as an important resource of diversity of language and culture, which would greatly help build confidence in their studies and later in their professional career. In order for all university faculty to learn the best practices of working with international students, faculty development workshops on related issues could be offered throughout the year. Leask (2009) indicates that “academic staff must themselves be highly efficient and effective intercultural learners with the skill to engage with and utilize diversity to develop their own and their students’ international perspectives”. The Faculty Development Committee, which organizes all faculty development workshops, could work collaboratively with the International Institute to offer this kind of workshops, where findings of research on international students are presented and discussed.

3. The university should work to develop more opportunities for international and domestic students to interact with one another. Research shows that intentionally supporting domestic and international student interactions are important in developing the cognitive skills, effective communication skills, and cultural awareness of all students (Arkoudis, et al., 2010). Thus, different departments of the university, such as the Foreign Language Department, Education Department,

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

and Study Abroad Program could collaborate to offer more opportunities for international students to work closely with their American peers both inside and outside of the classroom. These could include inviting international students as guest speakers in foreign language classes, and hosting conversation clubs for students to learn different languages from each other.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research was conducted with a limited number of Pathways students at a small Catholic university. Since findings cannot necessarily be generalized for different institutions of higher education, universities with larger population of international students might produce different results.

This study is a one-time snapshot of Pathways students' experiences. A longitudinal study that follows a cohort of Pathways students from year one to graduation could provide more insight to how the academic and social challenges change over time, and what factors affect their retention and success. Furthermore, this study focused merely on the Pathways Program and students enrolled in this particular program. Future studies could be conducted to further examine the advantages and disadvantages of an innovative "bridge program" (such as the Pathways Program) and a traditional "bridge program" by comparing two groups of students with similar English language proficiency, but enroll in two different kinds of programs. This research could examine their academic performance, social adjustment, and retention within the school.

Summary

With mindfulness of the year to year increases in the number of international students applying to U.S. institutions, and predictions for continued unabated growth of this population to all USA campuses, the site university recognized the necessity and value in establishing effective and efficient programs to attract qualified international students from around the world. The Pathways Program was established in response to the University's need for an engaging and supportive environment for new international students who require high quality academic English language competencies to facilitate the transition from their own countries to life on campus and in the U.S. The curriculum and support services of the Pathways program explores cultural diversity and provides students with value based opportunities to expand their cultural horizons. It has contributed significantly to the University mission of inclusive respect and diversity. It introduces international students to the engaged community life on campus, while creating a sense of belonging, and the feeling of connectedness among students, faculty, and staff. It also supports the many challenges (personal and educational) of international students, and empowers them by providing expanded awareness of cultural norms, both inside and outside of the U.S. classroom. The Pathways classrooms also provide a safe and accepting atmosphere of shared knowledge and respect for each student's contributions to young adult discussions and perspective. The Pathways Program is essential to the cultural collaborative initiatives of the University's strategic goal for the advancement of internationalization of the campus. Meanwhile, international students actively contribute to the diversity of the student population at the University, in correlation to the diversity of the University's urban environment in Philadelphia.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

The Pathways Program could be a model for other U.S. universities to develop similar bridge programs that provide comprehensive support to assist international undergraduate students' adjustment. They are an international student's first experience with the engaged learning framework of education, and cross-cultural collaboration of shared values and ideas. They are the stepping stones necessary for international students to not only receive high quality academic English language instruction, but also to assimilate to the university community of support and inclusiveness. Such programs provide a safety net for international students to bond, support each other, and develop a healthy view of respect and acceptance of the many cultures outside of their norm.

Moving forward, through developing Pathways-type programs and collaborative efforts within colleges, departments and student service units, U.S. universities and colleges will continue to attract and retain a large number of international students every year. The growth in the diversity of the student population in U.S. universities and colleges will result in improved methods of educating and preparing all students, both domestic and international, for a globalized world, poised to seize the opportunities of the coming era.

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Appendix A - Survey

PAGE 1 – Purpose of Survey

The purpose of this survey is to gather information about the academic and social experiences of the international students enrolled in the Pathways program at La Salle University.

Your individual responses will be completely confidential. Results of the survey will be used in two ways:

- to improve academic and social services and support for the Pathways students and other international students on campus
- to provide professors with data that can help them teach you more effectively

At the beginning of the survey, you will be asked for demographic information. At the end of the survey, you will be asked whether you would like to participate in focus group sessions to tell us more about your experiences in the Pathways Program.

Please complete and return the survey as an attachment to an email and send to lij@lasalle.edu. If you complete and return the survey by 11/30/2015, you will be entered a lottery to win a \$50 Starbucks gift card.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

PAGE 2 – About You

This information will help us interpret the data.

B1. How old are you?

☐ 18-20 ☐ 21-23 ☐ 24-26 ☐ 26 or older

B2. What college are you enrolled in?

☐ College of Arts and Sciences

☐ College of Business

☐ College of Nursing and Health Services

☐ I'm not sure

B3. How long have you studied in the U.S.?

☐ 0-12 months ☐ 13-24 months ☐ 25-36 months ☐ More than 3 years ☐ More than 48 months

B4. I first came to La Salle University as a:

☐ Freshman ☐ Transfer student ☐ English Language Program student

B5. Gender

☐ Male ☐ Female

B6. What country are you from?

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

PAGE 3 – Academic Adjustment

Your answers to questions in this section will help the researcher understand what academic difficulties you had in your first semester at the university.

A1. Which of the following made learning difficult in your first semester? **Please check all that apply even if it was true in only one class.**

- ☐ a) Too much of the vocabulary was unfamiliar.
- ☐ b) Too many examples used in class were taken from U.S. culture.
- ☐ c) Professors/instructors spoke too quickly.
- ☐ d) The professors/instructors didn't provide enough visual material (e.g. writing on the board or PowerPoint slides) while teaching.
- ☐ e) I wasn't clear about what to do during pair work or group work.
- ☐ f) I wasn't comfortable speaking during pair work or group work.
- ☐ g) I didn't understand other students during pair work or group work.
- ☐ h) There was too much reading.
- ☐ i) I couldn't understand the reading material.
- ☐ j) The directions given for writing assignments were unclear to me.
- ☐ k) I was unfamiliar with the types of writing assignments.
- ☐ l) I did not know (or knew very little) about plagiarism.
- ☐ m) My writing had too many grammar errors.
- ☐ n) I was not comfortable speaking in class because of my English.
- ☐ o) People could not understand me when I spoke.
- ☐ p) I couldn't understand my classmates.
- ☐ q) I was not familiar with the types of assignments given in class.
- ☐ r) There was too much homework.

A2. What other academic difficulties made learning difficult in your first semester?

A3. During your first semester, if you had any questions about the material or assignments, you generally preferred to get help from: **Please select no more than TWO.**

- a) The professor
- b) Classmates
- c) Pathways tutor
- d) Subject or writing center tutors
- e) The academic advisor
- f) Other (please list) _____

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

PAGE 4 - Social Adjustment

Your answers in this section will help the researcher understand the social difficulties you had in your first semester at the university.

For each item, please indicate how much difficulty you experienced in your first semester in the United States, in the following areas. “1” refers to “No Difficulty”; “2” refers to “Slight Difficulty”; “3” refers to “Moderate Difficulty”; “4” refers to “Great Difficulty”; and “5” refers to “Extreme Difficulty”.

	Item	No Difficulty	Slight Difficulty	Moderate Difficulty	Great Difficulty	Extreme Difficulty
S1	Making American friends	1	2	3	4	5
S2	Going to social events or gatherings	1	2	3	4	5
S3	Understanding jokes and humor	1	2	3	4	5
S4	Understanding ethnic or cultural differences	1	2	3	4	5
S5	Navigating campus	1	2	3	4	5
S6	Following university rules and regulations	1	2	3	4	5
S7	Dealing with faculty and staff at the university	1	2	3	4	5
S8	Adapting to housing accommodations	1	2	3	4	5
S9	Living independently away from family members	1	2	3	4	5
S10	Finding food you enjoy	1	2	3	4	5
S11	Going shopping	1	2	3	4	5
S12	Going to coffee shops, restaurants, fast food places	1	2	3	4	5

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

S1 3	Dealing with the climate	1	2	3	4	5
S1 4	Adapting to American etiquette	1	2	3	4	5

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

PAGES 5-6 – Pathways Program Services

Your answers in this section will help the researcher understand what courses/services the Pathways program provides worked or did not work.

For each item, please indicate how helpful you think the services Pathways program offers are. “1” refers to “Not Helpful”; “2” refers to “Slightly Helpful”; “3” refers to “Moderate Helpful”; “4” refers to “Greatly Helpful”; and “5” refers to “Extremely Helpful”.

	Item	Not Helpful	Slightly Helpful	Moderately Helpful	Greatly Helpful	Extremely Helpful
P1	INST 105 & 106 (INST 170 & 171)	1	2	3	4	5
P2	Weekly one-on-one tutoring	1	2	3	4	5
P3	Group study sessions	1	2	3	4	5
P4	Academic advising	1	2	3	4	5
P5	Social activities	1	2	3	4	5
P6	Pathways Orientation	1	2	3	4	5

P7. Please provide a brief explanation of your answer:

a) INST 105 & 106 (INST 170 & 171)

b) Weekly one-on-one tutoring

c) Group study sessions

d) Academic advising

e) Social activities

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

f) Pathways Orientation

P8. What other supporting services would you like the Pathways Program to offer to help you adjust more easily during your first year?

Thank You

Thank you for your participation in this survey. If you would like to participate in focus group sessions (about one hour session in February or March 2016) to tell us more about your experiences in the Pathways Program, please send an email to lij@lasalle.edu with “Focus Group Session” in the subject line and your name in the email. Thank you.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Appendix B – Focus Group Questions (FG)

1. Background Information:
 - a. What is your name?
 - b. Where are you from?
 - c. How long have you been in the U.S.?
 - d. Why do you come to the U.S. to study?
 - e. Why do you choose La Salle University?
2. When you first started as freshmen in the Pathways program, what academic difficulties did you have?
3. When you first started as freshmen in the Pathways program, what social difficulties did you have?
4. Now you have either been in the Pathways Program for a semester or have completed the Pathways Program, what initial difficulties remain challenges for you as of today?
5. Does the Pathways Program overall help you overcome your difficulties?
6. Do you think the Pathways orientation is helpful in overcoming your academic challenges? Why?
7. Do you think INST 105 & 106 is helpful in overcoming your academic challenges? Why?
8. Do you think the weekly one-on-one tutoring is helpful in overcoming your academic challenges? Why?
9. Do you think the group study sessions are helpful in overcoming your academic challenges? Why?
10. Do you think academic advising is helpful in overcoming your academic challenges? Why?
11. Do you think the social activities are helpful in overcoming your social challenges? Why?
12. Which social activity do you think is the most helpful?
13. Besides what the Pathways Program currently offers, what else can we do to help you overcome the academic and social difficulties that you face?
14. What suggestions/advices do you have for our incoming Pathways students?
15. Is there anything else that you would like to add before concluding the interview?

*The focus group questions are presented in a chronological order. These questions will be categorized into two different domains for further analysis: academic adjustment/support and social adjustment/support.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Appendix C - Relativeness of Research Questions

Research Question	Research Method	Relation to Survey Questions	Relation to Focus Group Session Questions
What academic and social challenges do Pathways students face?	Survey Focus group	A1,A2,A3,S1,S2, S3,S4,S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10, S11, S12, S13, S14	2,3,4
Do Pathways students from different countries have different academic and social challenges?	Survey Focus group	A1,A2,A3,S1,S2, S3,S4,S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10, S11, S12, S13, S14	2,3,4
How does the Pathways Program support its students to overcome their academic and social challenges?	Survey Focus group	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8	5,6,7,8,9,10,11, 12,13,14
How does tutoring support Pathways students in their academic studies?	Survey Focus group	P2,P3,P7	8,9
How does a specially designed curriculum support Pathways students in their academic studies?	Survey Focus group	P1,P7	7
What impact does the Pathways program have on students' freshmen year academic achievement (GPA)?	Archived records review		
How do social events support Pathways students in their social adjustment?	Survey Focus group	P5,P7	11,12
What effect does the Pathways program have on students' first year retention?	Archived records review		

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Appendix D – Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: (CEFR)

Common Reference Levels: Global Scale

Proficient User	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarize information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive device.
Independent User	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst traveling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic User	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Appendix E - CaMLA EPT Skills Level Scores and CEFR

Table 4.12: Comparison of EPT Cut Scores

CEFR Level Scores		Skill Level Scores	
Level	Score Range	Level	Score Range
A1	0–30	Beginner	0–26
A2	31–38	Beginner (High)	27–40
B1	39–52	Intermediate (Low)	41–50
B2	53–60	Intermediate	51–61
C1	61–80	Advanced (Low)	62–68
		Advanced	69–80

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Appendix F - Writing Placement Rubric

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Length/ fluency	No response to prompt	Writes less than one paragraph Writes a list Writes one or two paragraphs with significant errors	Writes more than one paragraph Includes an introduction Shows basic understanding of paragraph structure	Writes more than three complete paragraphs Includes an introduction, body, and conclusion	Writes extensively Includes an introduction, more than two body paragraphs, and a conclusion
Content	Copies question. Writes list of vocabulary words.	Attempts to address the prompt Uses simplistic response. Does not develop ideas with support Shows confusion	Addresses the prompt directly Does not show critical thinking Repeats information Minimal use of support to develop ideas	Addresses the prompt directly Shows critical thinking Uses specific examples with details for support Shows progression of thought	Addresses the prompt directly Shows critical thinking Expresses ideas clearly Fully develops ideas Shows progression of thought Attempts citation to support ideas with facts and figures
Cohesion	N/A	No or minimal use of sentence coordinators No flow Not all content is related to prompt	Some organization of ideas Some use of sentence coordinators Formulaic paragraph structure Choppy	Clear organization of ideas Use of transitions	Sophisticated use of transitions Smooth flow between ideas

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Vocabulary	N/A	Obvious translation from first language. Only basic vocabulary	Adequate or limited vocabulary Repetitive use of vocabulary Some evident use of translation	Some use of advanced vocabulary Variety in word choice Appropriate use of vocabulary in context	Native-like use of vocabulary Appropriate use of vocabulary and expressions in context
Grammar usage and spelling	N/A	Frequent errors Errors affect comprehensibility Frequent errors in basic structure Most clauses contain errors Little/no variety in syntax	Some errors Errors sometimes affect comprehensibility Few errors in basic structure Little variety in syntax	Some errors Errors rarely affect comprehensibility Some variety in syntax	Few errors Native-like use of advanced structures Consistent use of variety in syntax
Sentence mechanics	N/A	Frequent errors in punctuation and capitalization	Some errors in punctuation and capitalization	Some errors in punctuation and capitalization	Almost no errors in punctuation and capitalization
Voice and audience	N/A	May/may not show understanding of voice or audience	May/may not show understanding of voice or audience	Shows basic understanding of voice and audience	Demonstrates a solid understanding of voice, purpose and audience

Notes:

- A student might not fall completely into one category, but the student will be placed into the course that best fits his/her current level
- For lower level students, fluency is a solid starting point
- For higher level students, other criteria will be key indicator

Appendix G - Summary: Qualitative and Quantitative Results Answer Research Questions

Summary: Qualitative and Quantitative Results Answer Research Questions			
Research Question	Survey	Focus Group Interviews	Test, GPA, Retention
1. What academic and social challenges do Pathways students face?	<p>Top 4 Academic Challenges: (Table 4.3)</p> <p>a) too much of the vocabulary was unfamiliar</p> <p>f) not comfortable speaking during pair/group work</p> <p>i) could not understand the reading material</p> <p>m) too many grammar errors in writing</p> <p>Answers to Question A2 & A3</p> <p>Content knowledge & professors who are not sensitive to international students.</p>	<p>Academic Challenges:</p> <p>1) Limited English Language Skills (Table 4.14, number 1-6, quotes a-k)</p> <p>Reading, writing, listening, speaking, class participation, communications</p> <p>2) Lack of content/background knowledge (Table 4.14, number 7, quotes l,m,n)</p> <p>3) Professors not sensitive to international students (Table 4.15, number 2 quotes d,e,f)</p>	
	<p>Top 4 Social Challenges: (Table 4.8)</p> <p>S3) Understanding jokes and humor</p> <p>S1) making American friends</p> <p>S9) living independently away from family members</p> <p>S2) going to social events or gatherings</p>	<p>Social Challenges: (Table 4.16)</p> <p>1) Making friends (quotes a,b,c,d)</p> <p>2) Going to American parties (quotes e,f,g)</p> <p>3) Living Away from Family (quote h)</p>	

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

1a. Do Pathways students from different countries have different academic and social challenges during their first semester at the university?	<p>Students from different countries had similar academic challenges during their first semester at the university (Tables 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6)</p> <p>Students from different countries faced similar social challenges (table 4.8).</p>	<p>Students from different countries had similar academic challenges during their first semester at the university (tables 4.14 and 4.15).</p> <p>Students from different countries faced similar social challenges (table 4.16).</p>	
2. How does the Pathways Program support its students to overcome their academic and social challenges?	The Pathways program supported its students by offering helpful services including INST courses, academic advising, tutoring, group study sessions, and orientation (tables 4.10 and 4.11).	Pathways program supported its students by offering helpful services including INST courses, academic advising, tutoring, group study sessions, and orientation (table 4.17).	The Pathways Program provided adequate support to ensure their academic success during their first year, and helped to retain international students at the university (tables 4.22, 4.23 and 4.24).
2a. How does tutoring support Pathways students in their academic studies?	Tutoring was very helpful because it was personalized to meet individual student's special needs. It also helped students understand reading materials better, improve writing assignments, and keep students on schedule for their assignments (table 4.10 P2 and table 4.111 quotes g,h,i,j).	Tutoring helped Pathways students with writing assignments (table 4.17, number 2 quotes e,f,g).	

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

<p>2b. How does a specially designed curriculum support Pathways students in their academic studies?</p>	<p>INST helped them make new friends when they first arrived, adjust to American culture, and improve their academic English language skills, including writing, reading, speaking, and vocabulary (table 4.10 P1 and table 4.11 quotes a,b,c,d,e,f).</p>	<p>INST courses helped Pathways students in improving their English proficiency and making friends (table 4.17 number 1 quotes a,b,c,d).</p>	<p>Four out five students improved in their general receptive English in their first semester enrolled in the Pathways Program, especially in listening, vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension. All five students scored better in the second writing test, indicating that they all improved their English writing skills, especially in the areas of length/fluency, content, cohesion, vocabulary, grammar usage, spelling, sentence mechanics, and voice audience, during their first semester enrolled in the Pathways Program (tables 4.22 and 4.23).</p>
<p>2c. What impact does the Pathways program have on students' freshmen year academic achievement (GPA)?</p>			<p>Non-Pathways international students had higher GPA than Pathways students in academic year 2012-2013 and 2013-2014, while Pathways students had higher GPA in academic year 2014-2015 (table 4.24).</p>

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM

2d. How do social events support Pathways students in their social adjustment?	The social events provided opportunities for Pathways students to gather outside the classroom, explore campus and the city, adjust to American culture, and make new friends (table 4.10 P5 and table 4.11 quotes y,z,aa,bb,cc).	Social activities provided opportunities for Pathways students to hang out outside of the classroom (table 4.17 number 6 quotes n,o,p).	
3. What effect does the Pathways program have on students' first year retention?			Non-Pathways international students had higher retention rate than Pathways students in academic year 2012-2013 and 2013-2014, while Pathways students had higher retention rate in academic year 2014-2015 (table 4.25).